cineACTION

Sex, Terror, Madness, Canada

DAVID CRONENBERG
GUY MADDIN
BRUCE LABRUCE
RADICAL HOLLYWOOD
TORONTO FILM FESTIVAL

ISSUE 65

SEX, TERROR, MADNESS, CANADA...

Sex, terror, madness...and melodrama and politics as well... are regular features in recent Canadian cinema. This issue collects discussions of new work by a wide range of established and celebrated Canadian filmmakers—**David Cronenberg, Bruce LaBruce, Nettie Wild, Mark Achbar**. We are also pleased to feature a look at the wonderful and weird films of **Guy Maddin**. Several essays analyze films that have been less noticed in recent critical scholarship. Interviews with filmmakers let us hear from the artists themselves. Finally, we include two close looks at American films that raise the possibility, unlikely to some, of radical politics from within an increasingly global and imperial **Hollywood**.

In a regular feature, our editors review films from the annual **Toronto International Film Festival**, our glorious opportunity to savour the joys of world cinema.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Issue number 66, marking the twentieth year of publication for CineAction, will be edited by Robin Wood on the theme **Questions of Value: Evaluation, revaluation, devaluation**. What is the function of criticism today? By what criteria do we judge a film's quality or importance? We welcome the application of critical standards to specific films or filmmakers, through detailed analysis.
Submissions by Feb.1, 2005.

Issue number 67 will be edited by Florence Jacobowitz and Richard Lippe on the theme **Film on Film**. In recent years a number of directors, including Assayas, Godard, Haynes, Hou, Kiarostami and Scorcese, have made films which either pay tribute to a specific filmmaker or acknowledge the history and achievements of the cinema. The issue will address films and filmmakers that reflect the medium and the legacy of 20th century film culture.
Submissions by June 1, 2005.

NEW REVIEW SECTION

We are developing a new **short review section**.
We welcome short reviews of new theatrical releases, recent or classic films coming to DVD or books on film of any kind. Submissions welcome, no more than 500 words.

Scott Forsyth

Careful
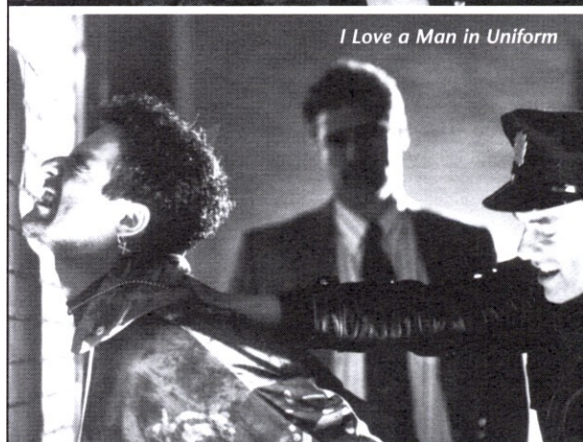
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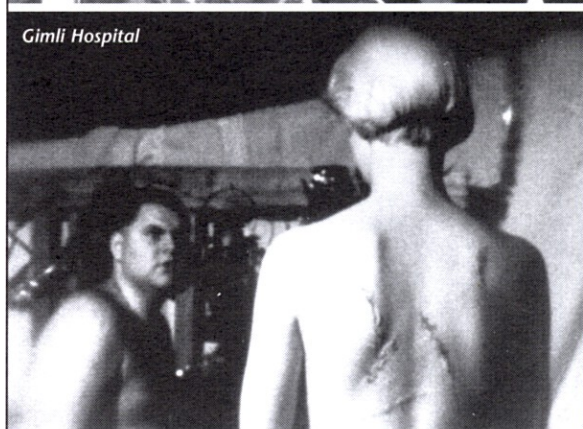
Gimli Hospital

Naked Lunch

In the Web with

David Cronenberg has long reigned as one of the principal North American auteurs of independent filmmaking. As a Canadian filmmaker, he has defined himself repeatedly in opposition to Hollywood feature film-making. He has operated under different industrial and national constraints, produced independent, original cinema, and at times taken an adversarial role toward blockbuster cinema. Despite this atavism, his work is global in scope and ambition and, as such, he is an ideal example of one of the most enduring concepts within film theory.

BY RENI CELESTE

The idea of auteurship in the cinema has a long history, from its early origins in *la politique des auteurs,*[1] that sought to translate the literary and romantic tradition of individual expression and genius to the screen; to postmodern theories that have sought to reconcile film's status as a mass, industrial art and to understand the film author as merely one of its effects or products.[2] As a methodology, auteurism has fallen in and out of favor, but it has a tendency for reappearing as new directors continue to establish themselves as the major stylistic and thematic center of a film's identity.

Cronenberg's films seem to fit seamlessly into this methodology. His works cohere stylistically and thematically, and document a private and obsessive interest in the body and its intersection with technology. He has throughout his career continued to reveal the grotesque anomalies, transformations, and divisions of the organic, and the mysterious corridors of the psyche. His work is singular and unique, and though it expresses existential themes, it describes them as the concerns of post-industrial, urban, technological individuals. But just what is the individual? And who is David Cronenberg? Film Studies, like all disciplines in the last century, inherited from critical philosophies a deep distrust of humanism and subjectivity, and someone as concerned with the

ABOVE **Typewriter from** *Naked Lunch*

DAVID CRONENBERG

SPIDER AND THE NEW AUTEURISM

limits of existence and experience as Cronenberg, is destined in such an environment to escape understanding. While attempts have been made to think the auteur in postmodern terms—where she or he is not a subject, but a system of signs, a social construction, or a product of the industry[3]—the term continues to be problematic because, basically, it implies that there is a dominant creative subjectivity expressing itself behind the work. In a certain respect, Cronenberg's presence may seem atavistic, and his complicity in auteurship and existential themes theoretically unfashionable. And yet, Cronenberg's portrayal of the *experience* of the postmodern filmmaker provides an important revision of the auteur that upsets the cohesiveness and unity that has bound this concept in all its versions, and a reinstatement of the subjectivity crucial to the meaning of both the term "auteur" and the content of film works. The existential proves itself not to be containable as passing fad or theoretical movement—it is a concern with the limits of human experience. Its relation to the organic and historical make accusations of its "timeless" or "eternal" structure simply naïve. Cronenberg's works raises an unavoidable question, "What is an auteur today, and what might such a figure offer the field?"

Naked Lunch (1991) is a Cronenberg film that takes up the issue of authorship quite literally, but it is his most recent film *Spider* (2002) that provides the basic metaphor of the web I will use to think through this depiction of authorship. Nevertheless, to understand *Spider*, it is useful to take a detour. *Naked Lunch* was based on the autobiographical work of another author, William

David Cronenberg (left) on the set of *Spider*

Burroughs, working in a different medium. Adaptation of the works of others is crucial to his understanding of authorship and he has taken on many projects based on novels of others. The image of authorship *Naked Lunch* describes is a realm of drug-induced dementia and excessive vulnerability and dependency. The author is not only the producer of his work, but is produced by his work. This is not to say that the subject is merely product or construction of the "social." The author and his characters are as much prisoners of fate, as men of action. Acted upon, as much as agents of action.

It is here that the metaphor of the web begins to eclipse the double, and border crossing become infinitely more complex. In the final scene Bill crosses the border between the Interzone and Annexia (two fictional landscapes) and two guards, one on each side of the car, stop to interrogate him. They ask for evidence that he is indeed a writer. He turns to his wife Joan, asleep in the back seat, wakes her, and tells her it's time for their William Tell routine. They enact the game that played such a decisive role in Burroughs's own life. She places the apple on her head, and his pocket pen becomes a gun that he aims at the apple. Mistakenly he shoots her in the middle of the forehead. He clutches her to his chest and a lone tear falls from his cheek. The guards are satisfied and allow him to pass, thus acknowledging this act as the beginning of writing. Authorship and action are wedded. Not in a unity of two bodies, or even three, but in a wound that bleeds and gapes endlessly. The web begins to open endlessly as authorship, murder, love, loss, the will, and the accidental echo their meanings and claims on the scene.

The film shares with the novel *Naked Lunch* an impossibility. It does not answer the myriad of questions opened through its actions, perhaps it even raises more than it resolves. And yet this scene, amongst others, buries not only the one, but the two, and with it the metaphor of the border. Three is just the beginning. To Cronenberg fans the triangular character placement in the opening of this shot is very familiar. In *Dead Ringers* (1988), for instance, the twin gynecologists are interrupted by the third figure, a love interest. Similarly, throughout this film, Bill Lee is cornered between twin authors: Burroughs, the novelist, and Cronenberg the filmmaker. And the very structure of the William Tell game also serves to unite their fates as authors by exposing a triple possibility:

1. He murdered his wife
2. He and his wife were the victims of a tragic accident
3. The action was both a product of this will and an accident

Burroughs's life was suspended from this particular moment onward within the uncertainty of these possibilities. It was a product of his will, or it was beyond his will. Nietzsche, the master of
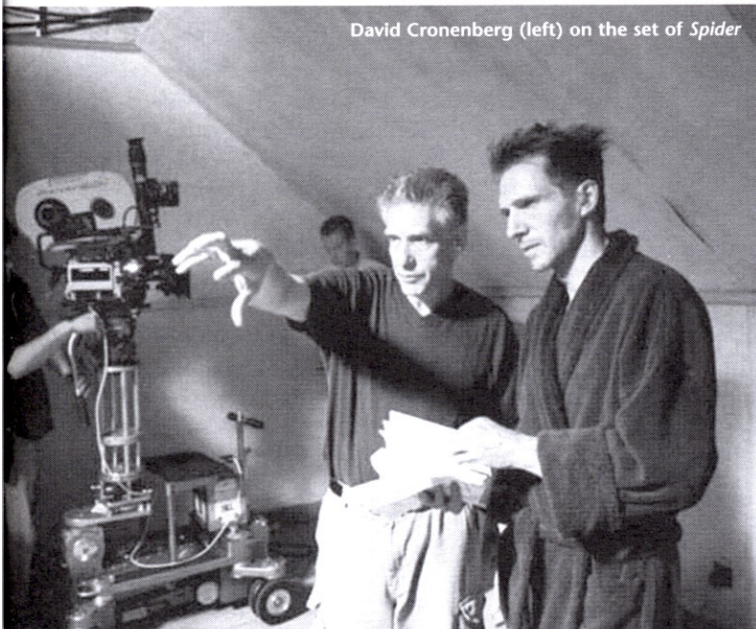
tragic thought challenged the Hegelian dialectic and pointed out that where there are two, there is always a third. This possibility describes the auteur as both the agent of his text/crime, and its victim. In a documentary *Naked Making Lunch,* Cronenberg acknowledges that he feels deeply responsible for what he produces, even if it is the product of unconscious desires. He warns us that one must be very careful what they create or bring into the world because it may take us to places we don't want to go. Though Cronenberg comprehends this duality in psychological terms as an interior division between conscious and unconscious desires, the more ominous division stands between subject and object.

Though this rupture severs the subject in the act of reflection—for example, to think is to be simultaneously the thinking subject and the object of thought—the tragic auteur is not merely the victim of a psychological rupture, but of a metaphysical one.

In an interview Cronenberg recounts a dream that could very well describe his entire body of work in cinema. He recalls,

"I had a dream that I was watching a film and the film was causing me to grow old fast. The movie itself was infecting me, giving me a disease, the essence of which was that I was aging. Then the screen became a mirror in which I was seeing myself age."[4]

Spider

Naked Lunch

The disease he describes is time itself. Its symptoms are transformation, becoming, and eventual mortality. The carrier of this disease is the film, the mirror, or more broadly reflection. In *Videodrome* (1983), for instance, Max Renn (James Wood) is both playing the video and being played by it. The cassette is literally being inserted into his body, rendering his experience in the world indistinguishable from representation. What he calls the "New Flesh" is this merging of the organic and the mechanical, or life and representation. This merging is taken to its erotic extreme in another adaptation from novel, the film *Crash* (1996), where the car crash, the collision between flesh and metal, opens up a new orifice in the body. The accident becomes the creation. The creation becomes the accident. From this combination, new form emerges. This intersection, where intention and the accident merge, is described as a violent, obscene, and deeply creative spot of subjectivity. From this wound, the self emerges. The subject is not described as merely the product of institutional, or cultural, forces, but as a maker, creator. And to create one first must be destroyed.

Cronenberg's most recent release, *Spider,* another adaptation, is the most literal attempt to describe the web, or creation, he has been weaving. This film depicts a divided diegesis that contains simultaneously two different temporalities occupying the same space. Spider, a mentally ill man, follows his former childhood self as the young boy plays out a key drama in his life. Though man and boy are in the same frame their temporal distance renders communication impossible. The spectator is woven into the web that Spider spins, following his point of view as if it were our own. We see alternately through the boy's point of view and the man's. The man witnesses events that the boy does not witness, thus sustaining their credibility and independence.

Spider the man, observes the boy's beloved dark-haired mother catching her husband in an act of adultery and being brutally murdered and planted in a shallow grave by her husband and his vulgar blond

lover. Spider the boy, suspects the murder when his mother is replaced by the blond and never returns home. The new couple treats the boy with disdain and he lives the nightmare of the loss of maternal love. Though his father insists he call the new woman his mother, he refuses. Instead the boy constructs a web of rope throughout the house that will turn on the gas stove with a tug of the string. In this web he captures the blond maternal replacement, gassing her to death. When the father rushes to her rescue and pulls her from the home, it is not the blond lover whose inert body emerges, but that of his dearly beloved mother. The spectators at this point realize that they, as well as Spider, have been caught in the web of a fantasy. Spider is mentally ill, and what has been witnessed is not the origin of his mental fragmentation, but its first manifestation.

Just as the game of William Tell played between Burroughs and his wife is both murder and accident, Spider has accidentally murdered his mother. What does this tell us about what it means to spin a web, to depict a narrative, or an interpretation? Who is the spider? The spider is the one caught in the very web he or she is spinning. The author may have caught the spectator (this is the objective of suspense), but no one stands outside the web, least of all the spider. Authorship is a tragic enterprise. It is contingent, in that as an act of freedom it did not need to have happened; and it is necessary, in that once this freedom is realized, it cannot be undone. It is the inseparability of these two spheres that renders the situation tragic.[5] One cannot will backwards. The mother will not be revived.

The instrument of this action is not without importance. The instrument that Bill Lee pulls from his coat in *Naked Lunch* is a pen. In other scenes the instrument is a typewriter that transforms into a bug that dictates to the writer through an obscene anal orifice, or that types automatically without his aid or consent. Extermination is the driving metaphor of *Naked Lunch*. It is Lee's objective to exterminate all rational thought. On a literal level, Bill Lee is employed as a bug exterminator. Joan and Bill become addicted to the bug poison, the drug of extermination. The question of the difference between authorship in the novel and the cinema is the question of the tool of extermination. The pen would not suffice as evidence, and the authorities asked for the act itself. The gun replaces the pen. From behind this gun the cinematic auteur emerges. The auteur points, shoots, and exterminates. The gun is not simply his agency, but also his bug poison, the prison of addiction through which he spins his fate. By pulling the trigger two becomes not one, but three, and four, and five. The link is severed. The tragic auteur with horror sees his mother's face emerge in his victim, so to speak. In this scene Bill Lee cries over the body of his wife. This moment is the loss of the containment or purity of the double, the couple, the twin brothers, etc. And it is the beginning of the disease of infinite representation. The auteur is a figure infected with a highly contagious virus. The vehicle that spreads the disease throughout the population is the screen. In *Videodrome*, for example, to have watched the video program was to become a part of the world of the program, and to be fated to death. Cronenberg reminds us that representation is lethal.

But just what is this web? Can we compare it to such postmodern structures such as the World Wide Web, a space of infinite locations with no central authority? But a spider web bears a center, and a spider, and the ending of *Spider* bears a truth, tears apart the fantasy, and exposes the mother. To be an author is to make claim to a position. Even if the web unfolds endlessly, it is a space with multiple centers; each vector is a potential moment of revelation and "truth." In a documentary on the making of this film, Cronenberg

opens the possibility that this final unveiling could also be a veil, and that it is not the end point of fantasy. This postmodernism corresponds to the ethos of his entire oeuvre. There is no endpoint to the reflection of the screen. The moment a film is projected, an infinite progression of fantasy is exposed that will not be eradicated. *Existenz* (2001), for example, offered no endpoint to the game, no reality that the spectator could be assured was the space beyond the game. But does Cronenberg's model of the web reduce all existence to a game, making it impossible to turn away from art or to declare a space beyond representation? Is the author more complicit in truth than even Cronenberg would admit?

The metaphors employed by Cronenberg (drug addiction, mental illness, disease) compromise significantly the idea of authorship as a realm of the will or intention. As we have seen, *Spider* is structured in such a way that the spectator is also placed inside of Spider's psyche leaving the viewer in a state of mental illness and unable to distinguish between fantasy and reality. But is the auteur privy to special knowledge? Has he deceived us? Is deception even possible within such terms that have rendered truth unattainable? If in the final frames of the film it is revealed that Spider accidentally killed the mother, and that the spectator has been complicit as well, this would seem to imply that there is a moment in which one can assert what is reflection and what is essence. *Spider* asserts several levels of interpretation and witness. Spider the man, occupies the same temporality as Spider the boy while the film viewer watches both. This in itself establishes the diegesis as fantasy. We are bearing witness to Spider the man's fantasy narrative of his childhood. And yet, we are fooled.

Critical to the idea of authorship that Cronenberg has described, is the collapse of screen, author, and spectator. Every one who comes into contact with representation is absorbed into its textual uncertainty. The author bears no more authority than the mentally ill Spider and the spectator who accepts his fantasy. But I have argued that the Spider is unreliable. He cannot be trusted because he knows too much. He spins a web of illusions, and yet, this is his greatest link to "truth." The new auteur exposes his "deception," and in doing so declares a center to his web. Though the Spider cannot separate himself from his own web, he is destined to perform a task and occupy a privileged location. He must venture out from the center and bind the victims who have fallen into his trap. Later he will nourish himself on these morsels. And then he too will succumb to the entanglements of the web. The new auteur reminds us that both making and watching movies can be dangerous, and even lethal.

Reni Celeste is currently a Research Affiliate at Yale University, where she is working on her second book, Action-Speed-Metropolis. Her work seeks to forge connections between continental philosophy and new media and contemporary culture.

1. The critics who published extensively in the *Cahiers du Cinema*, Truffaut, Bresson, and Godard, to name a few, inaugurated this school of film criticism and heralded certain authors over others as producers of great works of individual expression.
2. For instance, Dudley Andrew and Timothy Corrigan, who according to *Approaches to Popular Film*, represents the most recent contribution to the debate. Jancovich, Mark and Joanne Hollows, Eds. *Approaches to Popular Film*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995.
3. Dudley Andrew's effort to understand the author as a form of *ecriture* is the most interesting postmodern approach I've found because of the interiority it attributes to language in the author's "… quest for the state of wordlessness through words." In "The Unauthorized Auteur Today," *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, New York: Routledge, 1993, p. 84.
4. *Cronenberg on Cronenberg*, ed. Chris Rodley, Faber and Faber Ltd, 1992, p. 128.
5. This is how Schelling describes the dramatic (tragedy) in *Philosophy of Art*. Schelling, Friedrich. *The Philosophy of Art*. Trans. Douglas W. Stott. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.

Thoroughly Modern

I do feel a bit like Dracula in Winnipeg. I'm safe, but can travel abroad and suck up all sorts of ideas from other film-makers—both dead and undead. Then I can come back here and hoard these tropes and cinematic devices. … And I sit here in almost eternal darkness all winter long and try to make these dead things live.

—Guy Maddin in a 2004 interview

Maddin

BY DAVID PIKE

Wrapping up the fraught production of his fourth feature, *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* (1997), Guy Maddin confessed that, "I'm sick of the twenties. I've hung around in the twenties longer than the twenties hung around in the twenties."[1] Indeed, Maddin's habitation of the seminal decade of modernism could be said to date as far back as his formative undergraduate friendship with fellow Winnipegger John Boles Harvie, who not only shared with Maddin his encyclopedic knowledge and cinephiliac obsession with the silent cinema, but immersed himself in the role: speaking, dressing, and acting like a twenties dandy.[2] While Maddin's persona is resolutely contemporary, his cinematic twenties are the navel point of an idiosyncratic but highly original and increasingly influential engagement with the phenomenon of modernism in its myriad facets, a phenomenon that can be said to have stretched from the Romantics through to the end of the Second World War. Consequently, when he accepted the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's offer that his next feature after *Twilight* be a film of the Royal Winnipeg Ballet's adaptation of Bram Stoker's 1897 novel, *Dracula*, he was not in fact escaping from his twenties aesthetic, but stretching its centripetal force into an earlier thread of modernism. In this article, I will discuss the many strands of Maddin's modernism, from the historical aspects of a Manitoban chronology extending from the 1870s to the middle of the twentieth century; to the primitivist credo of one's life as a performance, one's art as a melodramatic refraction of one's life, and one's life and art as wholly at odds with the establishment conventions of professionalism; to the birth of the cinema itself in 1895 and the fecund decades of its childhood search for its most effective identity; to the modernist obsession with memory, nostalgia, the past, and buried truth. Moreover, I will argue that it is through Maddin's peculiar engagement with the era of modernism that we can best distinguish his work from the labels of postmodernism, camp, or pastiche to which it has so often been reduced.

The Garage Modernist

> It's sort of like the Ramones. I just refuse to learn how to play my instrument. The Ramones will never go away, as far as I'm concerned. I work more slowly than they did, but I hope that by the time I go away I'll have a nice body of work.

—Guy Maddin in a 2004 interview

Central to Maddin's persona as a filmmaker is an insistence on his status as an amateur, autodidact dilettante, an insistence custom-arily framed in terms of laziness and neurosis. In interview after interview, he has honed the slacker image of the aimless twenty-something who got into films because he couldn't be bothered to do anything else. Still, unlike what we could perhaps call the mainstream American slackers, the video-store, computer game and internet addicts that followed Tarantino's inspirational lead, Maddin's version taps the modernist lode of self-mortification rather than the late twentieth-century keg of self-promotion. Commenting on his decision to publish the film diaries from the production of *The Saddest Music in the World* in the *Village Voice*, Maddin sounds genuinely tormented by the embarrassment their exposure will cause him.[3] Deadpan episodes like the opening inability to plant a tree from a sapling in his backyard to commemorate the start of the production read like the absurdist failures of Dostoyevsky or Kafka: frozen ground, skyrocketing overtime rates, and irreparable damage to the garden of his beloved and deceased Aunt Lil echo classic motifs of loser modernism.[4] The details of Maddin's crush on his female stars Isabella Rossellini and Maria Medeiros, however, mine a contemporary vein of pure lust that would not be out of place in a Farrelly Brothers comedy: confessing that he feels he has known Medeiros for years because of the nude shots he has downloaded off the internet, or penning a delirious paean to the intimate joys of ADR (Automatic Dialogue Replacement) which concludes, "At bedtime I let spit-lubricated Isabella slide out of my cramped and throbbing embrace, and dismount tremblingly from her lips."[5]

Such moments form a leitmotif of the journals published last year in *From the Atelier Tovar*.[6] From the way Maddin also brings them up in the more public forum of the interview, they would seem to be motivated by an idiosyncratic twist on the persona of the director as fan that has dominated non-studio filmmaking since the days of the French New Wave. It is less frequently observed that the nouvelle vague itself borrowed the idea of the artist as fan and the slumming populism implied by it from a strand of modernism that originated in Romantic poets such as Baudelaire and his fellow *flâneurs* in the Paris of Louis-Philippe. It reached its apogee in the Surrealists, the first true cinephiles, who championed the random violence, visual realism, and narrative preposterousness of the downmarket early serial thrillers and urged the unashamed pursuit of sexual obsession even as their own writing, art and filmmaking remained avant-garde in the extreme. In a review of a program at New York's most punishingly old-school house of experimental film, the Anthology Film Archives, a program that paired Z-movie schlock (*East of Borneo*, *Road to Salina*, *The Entity*) with the found-footage films inspired by three artists' obsession with actresses who appeared in them, Maddin alternates his self-consciously adjective-laden and over-excited prose with just enough crit-speak to maintain his bona fides and a fine instinct for

Twilight of the Ice Nymphs

"the boner quotient" that for him appears to lie at the core of all cinephilia. He concludes by inserting himself into the genealogy of underground obsessives from Joseph Cornell to Peter Tscherkassky by fantasizing about his own future homage to the reigning queen of "Cinema Rejecta," Denise Richards, with a found-footage remix of *Undercover Brother* (2002).[7]

It is precisely the "boner quotient," the translation of the classic feminist critique of cinema's voyeuristic foundation into the sophomoric lexicon of the contemporary teen movie, that distinguishes Maddin's persona from camp.[8] Maddin's camp side certainly exists; it is perhaps most in evidence in *Sissy-Boy Slap-Party* (1995), which appears to have been strongly influenced by his friend, fellow-filmmaker, and actor in the film, Noam Gonick, whose flamboyantly gay persona punctuates Maddin's recent oeuvre as an untroubled beacon from a sexually liberated present to a neurotically heterosexual fellow-traveler still working through the repressions of an earlier epoch. While Gonick happily imagines his marginalized films bypassing conventional distribution routes to reach a subculture of "clandestine basement circle jerks around DVD players," Maddin's equally sex-saturated films have always been perversely erotic rather than gleefully pornographic.[9] Until *Cowards Bend the Knee*, Maddin's "rules for nudity," as he put it, "ha[d] always been the same as the Hays Office limply enforced in pre-code pictures … a little bit of nudity as long as it's a long shot, smudged out or over-exposed."[10] Paradoxically, the tone of the films' repressed and tortured context (think of Johann staring at his mother bathing through a mirror attached to a stick while hanging by his knees in a stone-lined air shaft in *Careful*) seems closer to the closeted fifties; there is none of the sophisticated and seductive naughtiness characteristic of the pre-code thirties: until Meta in *Cowards* and the two starlets of *Saddest Song*, Maddin's actors were generally filmed in as unflattering a light as possible, erotic only, perhaps, in the same fetishistic way that led many men who were adolescents in the fifties to prefer Doris Day to Marilyn Monroe—indeed, in *Twilight*, he even managed to dampen the appeal of the Québécoise icon and art-house favorite, Pascale Bussières.

In *Cowards*, it is as if the challenge of an alien forum—the cool and haughty confines of the high art world represented by the Power Plant Gallery in Toronto's Harbourfront Centre, which commissioned the piece—pushed (or perhaps empowered) Maddin to take control of his images in a different way than he had previously done, bringing his sexualized melodrama out of the closet, so to speak, and embracing the mantle of hipness being thrust upon him. Published in *The Village Voice* and *Film Comment*, fêted with retrospectives in Rotterdam, New York and elsewhere, granted the big budget, bona fide stars, and commercial distribution of *Saddest Song*, Maddin is being pushed beyond the brink of cultdom to the status of a legitimate international auteur. Still, it takes only a quick glance over at his Toronto-based compatriot Atom Egoyan's analogous ticket to global renown, *Exotica* (1994), to register that

The Saddest Music in the World

Maddin may never stray too far from his provincial slacker roots. Both *Exotica* and *Cowards* revolve around the dynamics of the sex show; both weave their melodramatic narratives out of their sexual theme; and both were received by critics primarily as commentaries on the complicity of the spectator's act of viewing them, a reception that permitted the ambivalently exploitative quality of that theme to be left unexamined within its safe theoretical container while audiences left no doubt what had brought many of them to the gallery, theater, or, later, rental venue. *Exotica* used its slick, soft-core derived visuals and detached characters to uncover an emotional core of humanity out of the audience's thwarted expectations of perversion. *Cowards* counters Egoyan's nurturing and spatially anonymous strip club with the equally male, equally eroticized and powerfully localized setting of the Winnipeg Arena. And while Egoyan's film strongly demarcates its heterosexual main plot from the gay subplot in which Don McKellar's pet-shop owner picks up men at the opera, in Maddin's film, the homoerotic milieu of the hockey rink and dressing rooms insinuates itself outward through the entire action, however straight its primary actors may play their roles.

Rather than an ironic nod at a supremely subtext-aware contemporary audience, however, the steaming bodies of the Maroons' shower scenes appear to have been reproduced directly from Maddin's childhood memories. In articles, interviews and in his unfilmed autobiographical treatment, *The Child without*

Qualities, Maddin returns to the memory of himself as a child lathering up the naked players' backs and a primal scene combining a brush with celebrity with an eye-level gape at future Hall-of-Famer Gump Worsely's "makeshift fig-leaf contrived out of suds."[11] Because it is rooted so firmly in Maddin's own childhood, this image seems in his oeuvre less a repressed observation of latent homosexuality than a simple fact of his, and perhaps of any life, the child's free-floating, sense-based sexuality; in "The Womb Is Barren," he pairs the memory with that of the adjacent room of the players' wives: "I loved the olfactory shock of passing from this chamber redolent of wet diapers and breasts swollen with milk into a room of damp men, the dubious smell of athletic supporters, unlaced skates and drenched jerseys."[12] The bowels of the stadium are a Proustian *lieu de mémoire*, evoking an irreducibly, viscerally personal blast from the past whose intimate meaning the artist tries his best to translate into a common language, "In the Winnipeg Arena, my inner and outer landscapes were one and the same thing."[13]

It is a past, moreover, that can no longer directly be accessed: the Arena was, as Maddin put it, "remodelled, modernized, stupid" in 1979, with the same process occurring to those who had grown up with it (it had opened in 1955, a year before Maddin was born).[14] At the same time, and in good modernist fashion, the artist's representation of his self is meant to provide an emblem, a rebus for all who follow him. Maddin has insisted over and over,
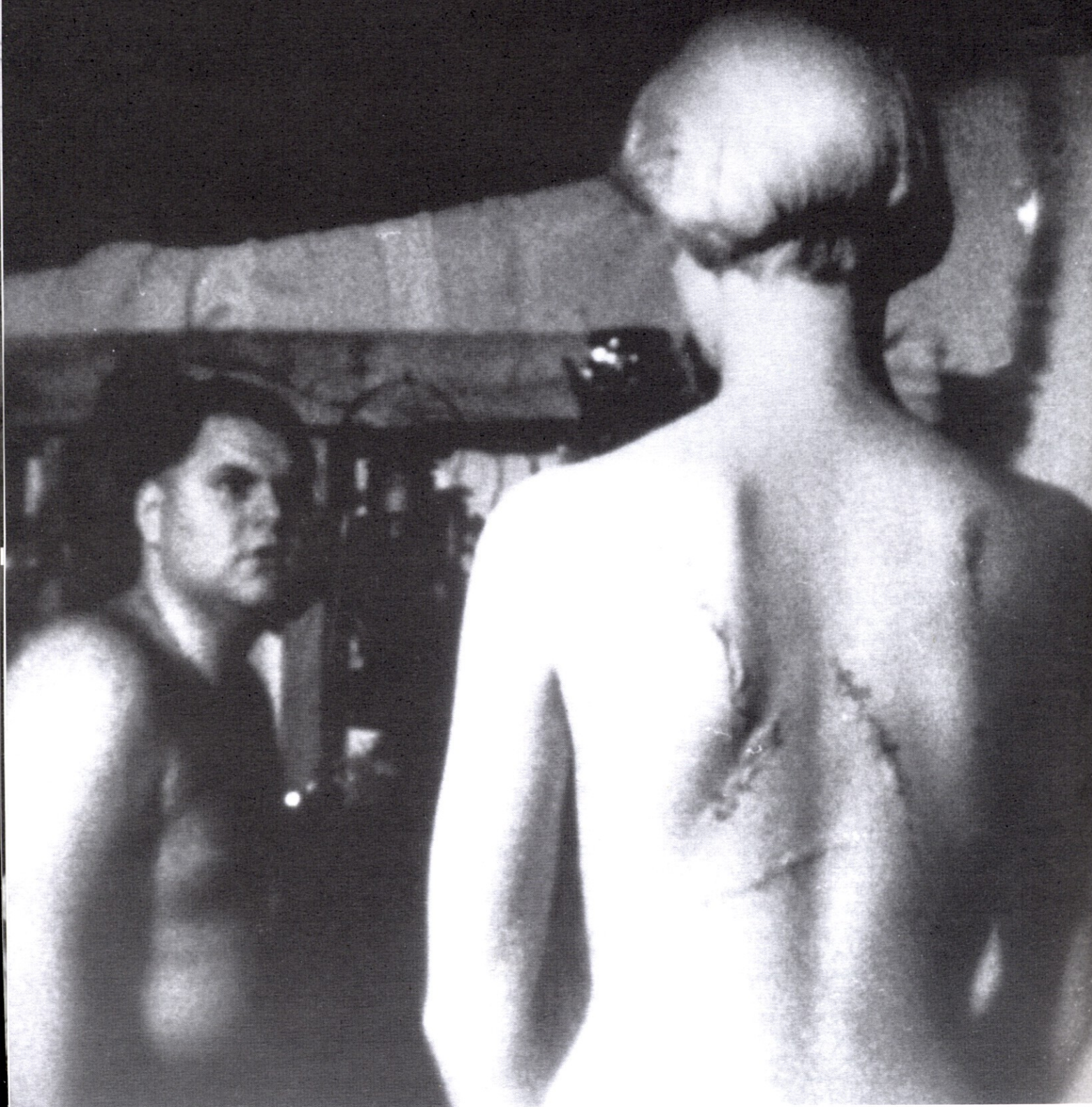
that *Cowards* is wholly autobiographical and true, and we should take him at his word, because the truth he is insisting upon is not the (equally performative) truth of reality television and afternoon talk shows but the truth of modernists such as Kafka or Proust or Beckett or Bruno Schulz, autobiography as a mode for revealing the hidden layers of the self and the society from which that self emerged, not the superficies treated by the conventions of realism.

Proust was a lethargic and asthmatic social butterfly who nevertheless managed to complete a three-thousand page novel on top of a lifetime of occasional writing. Maddin certainly does not aspire to such length, but his résumé is more than respectable for someone working as far from the mainstream of movie financing as he has done. Granted, he has succeeded reasonably well in regularly winning state funding, and has made a virtue of working on a shoestring budget, but laziness must still be set down as a facet of rather than a hindrance to his creative personality. But then, isn't such laziness itself also a contemporary take on the hoary old modernist *Sprachkriese*, the ability to write thousands of words on the impossibility of writing any words at all? Nevertheless, while his themes more closely resemble the literary, so-called high modernists of Proust and others, Maddin's modus operandi as a self-declared primitivist is closer to the avant-gardes whose styles permeate his filmmaking. Speaking about how he stumbled into the role of filmmaker, Maddin explains that, "to be a great author you need to be a genius and need to have been well read for your entire life, but to be a great pop star you just need to pick up a guitar, and maybe to be a filmmaker of some impact it's more like being a pop star. You just pick up a camera, seize a garage band aesthetic, and go out there."[15] It was during the first decades of the twentieth century that the ethos of the garage band became viable, that artistic creation was ideologically severed from classical technique by movements such as the Surrealist practice of the exquisite corpse or the Dada celebration of the fact that anyone at all could be an artist. In the end, it is always an untenable stance, not only in the fine arts, but in popular music as well: however hard we may try to commemorate the truly garage-band bands, the pure punks that couldn't play their instruments, couldn't write songs, couldn't sing, and were lousy performers, what we return to and what we enjoy are not the failed extremes but the brilliant compromises of trash with art. Indeed, the very act of commemoration transforms incompetence into genius in the process: you simply can't listen to the Ramones today as a tabula rasa.

The motion pictures were invoked by the avant-garde back in the twenties, but the primitivist aesthetic did not hit the cinematic mainstream until the breakup of the studios, the rise of exploitation cinema, and the emergence of the French and other new waves in the fifties and sixties. Money remained a hurdle, however, and it has only been with the digital video revolution that cinema has reached the turning point popular music achieved in the sixties. There is a tacit but seldom enunciated class distinction here, for it is from the lower middle-class suburban and provincial kids that most garage bands and most indie-filmmakers have emerged, while authors (not to mention most mainstream filmmakers) generally need, to paraphrase Maddin, a nurturing milieu and a lot more connections. Maddin's stubborn faithfulness to Winnipeg, where he still lives and works, to the memories of the hockey arena and his aunt Lil's hair salon, to the cabin on the lake at Gimli, and to the slacker ambitions of the Drones is imbued with the demographics of the garage band. Now, you can of course parlay garage band status into superstardom—witness Tarantino or Nirvana—but then you're a sellout.

Indeed, this appears to be what R. George Godwin is complaining about in his recent history of the Winnipeg Film Group: that

it shouldn't be considered a virtue to do something (twenties films) that used to be really easy and has since become incredibly difficult.[16] This misses the point, however, which is first of all that Maddin insists that he started making films this way because he was ill-trained and incompetent, that he could not in fact make movies in any other way, and that he continues to commit howlers in each film he makes.[17] To view his twenties aesthetics as merely a formal gesture of nostalgia or a collector's preciosity is to ignore the crucial ways in which the period of the twenties was responsible for shaping our current understanding of his project and the aesthetic concepts underlying it.

It is the range and depth of their immersion in the twenties that has enabled Maddin to export his own marginality out of garage band cultism and into urban hip. Paradoxically, the hipper he has become, the more he has revealed the complex underpinnings of what had been easy to regard as a simple pose. The more his movies delve into twenties culture and aesthetics, the more they prove to be immersed in the simultaneously sordid and tragic detritus of the director's own life. What at first looked like spot-on absurdist inventions—the father in *Careful* losing his eye to his mother's brooch; the epidemic of suicides; the saga of Gimli—turn out to be perfectly factual episodes in Maddin's life, and common knowledge to just plenty of Winnipeggers with an ear for oral history. Moviemakers worked this way back in the sixties, but they don't anymore—they either make movies that have nothing to do with their lives, or they transmute their obsessions into fiction (think Egoyan and Cronenberg, or Lynne Stopkewich and Gary Burns), or they documentarize them pure and simple (the recent *Tarnation* [Jonathan Caouette] and *Super Size Me* [Morgan Spurlock] or anything by Michael Moore). The vertiginous interplay between family history and Maddin's aesthetic works its way out through two categories dear to the practitioners of modernism: the child and the city.

Child's Play

Canada's Centennial splashed a brief Kodachrome illumination into the musty basements, closets and garages of our nascence. But the illumination was for us children alone, the hyper-sensitive brown studies and centennial projects within our cubbyholes remained guardedly private. … We inscribed the choreographies of our revolutionary pleasures behind our bedroom headboards, interrupted regularly from without by terrors so sudden and vehement as to flatten our lungs.

—Guy Maddin, *The Child without Qualities*

It is a commonplace of the history of modernism that it was a phenomenon of cities: London, Paris, Berlin, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Barcelona, Rome, New York. In Maddin's recreation of the period, Winnipeg takes its proud place among the urban centers of modernism. The city emerged in the late nineteenth century, and its heyday lasted from the twenties through to 1950.[18] While, as he put it, "I had to build a Winnipeg because you still don't want to see the real Winnipeg," Maddin has nevertheless remained faithful to its industrial past in a poetic fashion, creating his fantastic sets in disused industrial buildings around the city (*Twilight of the Ice Nymphs* in the former Vulcan Iron Works, *Heart of the World* in

the former Dominion Bridge Works, *Saddest Song* in an abandoned steel mill), or, in the case of *Tales from the Gimli Hospital*, in the hair salon of his recently retired Aunt Lil.[19] Modernism was concentrated in urban centers due both to industrialization and to the unprecedented scale of migrations across Europe and over to North America. Maddin's films touch on the key immigrant populations of Winnipeg. *Gimli Hospital* darkly mocks the tragic history of a smallpox epidemic in New Iceland (on Lake Winnipeg north of the town) that killed some of Maddin's own ancestors; *Archangel* recalls the city's Ukrainian population, not to mention the local soldiers that fought in the Great War, more of whom were killed than from any other part of the country; even the Germanic *Bergfilm* heritage of *Careful* has an ethnic resonance for the flattest region of Canada.[20] Melnyk complains with some justification that this heritage has generally been ignored in the reception of Maddin's work in terms of a contextless avant-garde.[21] Such oversight has long also been a part of scholarship on modernism, which has tended to regard the avant-garde as functioning in a purely formal register, allowing personal history and specificity of place and time to give way to the demands of a universal and universalizing aesthetics.

To recover the specificities of different modernisms is complicated because one of the primary goals of the epoch was to subvert traditional patterns of meaning based on the realist notions of self and society that had dominated the nineteenth century. Most if not all modernist artists and writers would have resisted the reduction of their production to the data of their own life and times; nevertheless, most if not all of them addressed subversions generated from those data at targets likewise derived from them. A key component of these data was the movies, which only began to become respectable in the twenties. That cusp between the vulgar energy of their slumming past and the regularized and regulated craft of sound and the studio decades is a crucial factor in Maddin's fascination with the period. Like the characters in most of his films, the motion picture as an art and as a business was in its late adolescence, wildly and uneasily wielding a potent cocktail of naive motivations and adult desires. It was those nascent desires that had caused the traumas and created the joys of childhood, but it was ensuing adulthood that caused them to be repressed, distorted, and forgotten amid the swirl of sanctioned forms and conventions. This was the modernist narrative of childhood and memory as the path to its hidden truths. It was formulated most famously by Freud and Proust, but as a trope it was everywhere in the early decades of the century, and the cinema, the youngest of the arts, was the ideal place to project the anthropomorphic potential of childhood development (or the lack thereof) as a theory of history. The early cinema was regarded as appealing to the "childish" portions of the population, but there were many who turned that perjorative appellation on its head, celebrating the childlike wonders of Keaton, Chaplin, early Disney, Max Fleischer, and Lotte Reiniger as gateways into an aesthetic place unapproachable through the stodgy rigidities of the more venerable arts.

In the treatment for perhaps his most self-consciously modernist short, *The Eye, Like a Strange Balloon, Mounts towards Infinity* (1995), Maddin's wish list of influences conjures an unlikely but symptomatic merging of a Symbolist modernism with early cartoons, a dead seriousness of formal and thematic intent joined to an iconoclastic, popular playfulness: "I would like to make a mini-melodrama, very music driven – like a Fleischer Brothers cartoon . . . Music will be inexorably linked to the visuals: it should drive the visuals like a Silly Symphony, but with a more Poe-like dead weight."[22] One of the opening shots introduces the synaesthesia that seems to bind these opposing influences formally: a clam

shell opens and closes, shooting out steam and blowing like a train whistle, heralding the train wreck and tragic love triangle that are to come. Melodrama is, of course, a time-honored component of the genre of children's literature that was invented by the Victorians, but it has seldom received its due in the movies, and has nearly always been played for laughs, as in Disney's *101 Dalmations* (1961, 1996). Nor does Maddin deflate the high seriousness of a Poe, a Redon, or an Abel Gance, whose *La Roue* (1923) supplies the narrative and visual backbone of *The Eye*, at least not in the manner of a camp revision. Rather, he brings to them the child's point of view, the "mini-melodrama": the child that was cinema in the twenties and the later child that knows how to view that cinema for what was most important about it. The same attitude is evident in an anecdote he relates in an interview, "I once watched a Buster Keaton movie shown at eighteen frames per second [silent speed], and the gags took forever to unfold, like *Ordet*. Maybe if we watched them at nine frames per second, they'd be funny again."[23] The ideal Maddin film would be the film able to maintain comedy and melodrama in perfect, mutually illuminating counterpoise.

The first movies that had a lasting impact on Maddin were his family's forgotten treasure trove of silent 16mm films that he discovered one day hidden away in the house (and which perhaps included the Keaton reel mentioned above).[24] The twenties are not just the historical period of modernism for those artists now in or approaching their middle age (Maddin was born in 1956); they are the decade when our parents were children. Our own childhood is full of available and buried memories both comforting and horrible; our parents' early years are something far more mysterious, glimpsed only at second- or third-hand, through stories, photographs, mementoes, rumors and fantasies. Growing up with three teenage siblings, the displacement of Maddin's memories of the past would have been even more intense. In *The Child without Qualities*, Maddin writes that not just the toys and dolls "knew a better quality of play" because of the many hands they had passed through and been subjected to before he came along, but "a residue of better quality seemed to sit on everything in the deserted house. The house held a dormancy, a potential to divulge what it held for his family before."[25] The child's play, he suggests, was aimed at enacting this potential: "Sometimes he intentionally separated himself from his favorite toys, and played with memories of them. And then played with the memories of the memories."[26] It would not be a stretch to regard Maddin's films as memories of memories of something from which one has willfully separated oneself; this would account not only for the many strategies of distancing them from the viewer with the celluloid equivalent of the teethmarks, spit-stains, and near-dismemberments that bestowed the "residue of better quality" onto the family toys, but also for the undeniable desire for the emotional connection intimated by them, a connection that lies, as the introductory title to *Careful* would have it, "lost behind the Ranges Lost and waiting for you: Go!"

Deprivation, even for the most privileged of children, is the essence of childhood, and it is important to recognize the inseparability of the pleasure derived out of that deprivation from the pain caused by it. Like many modernists, Maddin has cultivated this childhood insight (or insight about childhood) into his mature aesthetics, privileging the insights of the local, the marginal, the forgotten, the fragmentary, over the easy allure of the clean, new and polished. Maddin once sent a film critic a tape of one of his movies caught straight from television, complete with commercials. Rather than apologetic, he was pleased with the idea, comparing it to his encounter with *Vertigo*, "the very first movie I memorized off TV . . . A friend of mine caught it on TV, but this

was pre-video, so he just made an audio tape of it. And I listened to it, maybe about a hundred times before ever seeing it including the commercials. They placed one unfortunate commercial right in the middle of the revelation that Judy is Madeleine … and it was tremendous. So that gave me a thrill. And so I was hoping for some similarly unfortunate mutilations to my movie. And I got some."[27] It is easy to shrug the story off as post-modern archness and self-protection. And, sure, Maddin doesn't mind coming off as weird, he even likes it at times—that is, after all, part of the *épater la bourgeoisie* mentality of modernism that survives today only in isolated enclaves such as Winnipeg. But on its own, intentional weirdness can not account for the undeniable power of Maddin's films, the sheer pleasure and dread of watching them. No one who grew up with black-and-white television, portable cassette recorders, and scratchy LPs can fail to recall a moment such as the one ele-

vated by Maddin into an artistic credo.[28]

There was no irony in the contemporary sense of the word in modernism, only the biting, tragic variety that dates back to the ancient Greeks, the kind that makes you want to forget what you had tried so hard for so long to remember. Like old tragedies, Maddin's films are replete with ghosts—the Hamlet's father variety in *The Dead Father*, *Careful* and *Cowards*; the lost loved one in *Gimli Hospital*, *Archangel*, and *Cowards*—not to mention spectral presences such as the attic-bound brother Franz in *Careful*, or the vampire, Dracula. Not frightening in the strict sense of the word, their presence is a driving force in the narrative action; like childhood memories, they are both impotent and overwhelmingly powerful. Similarly, the films are replete with images of bodies resurrected, or at least brought out into the open from their resting places, whether figuratively, as in Einar's story of the violation of

Careful

Archangel

Snjofridur's body in *Gimli Hospital* or the wax figures in the Hall of the All-Time Maroons in *Cowards*, or literally, as in the buried bodies unearthed to the horror of the townfolk in *Careful* or the apocalyptic emergence of the dead from their graves in *The Heart of the World*.[29] We may take pleasure in watching them, and Maddin may take pleasure in manipulating them, but the characters are not graced with the same distance. Immersed in the melodrama, they would all be better off remembering nothing. Unfortunately, like the amnesiac soldiers fighting a war that has already ended in *Archangel*, they remember just enough to suffer from and be haunted by it, but not enough to find their way out before it is too late. "Amnesia," according to Maddin, "is a timeless storytelling device. Forgetfulness is a kind of anesthetic for the painful life we all live. We're forced constantly to think about the shameful things we've done, the painful things that have happened to us. We owe most of the feelings we have, as sensate beings, to shoddy memories. The sheer erratic nature of memory keeps life a Luna Park."[30] Childhood is a lifetime of boredom, suffering and shame; it is also the source of a large part of our happiness, and the surest link we have to the world that came before us. Only children are so constituted as truly to enjoy the Luna Park of life, screaming the whole way out of terror and exhilaration inextricably combined. Grownups on the roller coaster are usually either bored out of their skull or too busy having a heart attack to have fun.

It could be argued that Maddin's oeuvre constitutes one long refutation of the post-modern argument that we have no feeling left, and a demonstration of the fact that there is still a difference between false memories and shoddy ones. This is one reason he has engaged with Hollywood more and in a more intricate manner than perhaps any other Canadian filmmaker. Hollywood—and, as always by metonymy the United States—is the Luna Park of Maddin's adult mind. While his childhood experience of bursts of America through radio static and television test patterns was an inevitable consequence of life in the hinterlands, the mature form he has given to that experience is anything but. The references with which he dots his interviews demonstrate an ecumenical range still all too rare in the anti-Hollywood discourse of Canadian cinema—everything from the *Cremaster* trilogy to Alyssa Milano. Witness the "Dreyer and Joan [Crawford]" course he has taught at the local university, or the list of "Guilty Pleasures" he submitted to *Film Comment*, which roams from a "naval musical," obscure Howard Hawks and Howard Hughes war movies and a Charlton Heston jungle melodrama to cult experimentalist George Kuchar and Oskar Feininger's three-minute modernist city-poem, *From Munich to Berlin*.[31] In his brief comments, Maddin appears to eschew the "guilty" part in favor of the "pleasures," implicitly refusing the high/low distinction of the category itself. If you put enough memories between yourself and Hollywood, he suggests, the themed Disney World rides on which they intend to take you start to break down into something more nebulous and passé— after all, what could be more outdated, more urban and modernist than a Luna Park, a word coined in the twenties from the eponymous Coney Island amusement park to describe the midways of Europe? These days, we only see them in old movies.

Hollywood was young once, too, and it lived its youth during that same magic period that produced everything meant to eliminate what Hollywood would soon come to stand for the world over. A legacy of the First World War, the hegemony was brand new back in the twenties, even in Canada, and the shopworn products of the time no longer carry the patina of market domination that still radiates from today's blockbusters, the only lure the audience seems to need. And, as much as Maddin's films are overtly indebted to the great European classics, we shouldn't forget (and he certainly hasn't) how many of the Europeans were also making movies in Hollywood, and how twisted the back lot stuff of the twenties and thirties could sometimes get. After all, this was the period when Douglas Fairbanks and David Selznick brought Eisenstein to Hollywood on the success of *Potemkin*. Maddin's approach can be distinguished either from the respectful recreation of European cinema (as, for example, in *Shadow of the Vampire* [2000], E. Elias Merhige's wonderful take on Murnau's *Nosferatu*), or the American independent revision of Hollywood, which seldom delves further back into cinema history than *film noir*. Both strategies tend to take the older film syntax at face value, recreating it with the obsessive fidelity of the connoisseur (the production design and cinematography of Todd Haynes's *Far from Heaven* [2002] or Curtis Hanson's *L. A. Confidential* [1997]), often tweaking the themes to bring out their resemblance to current mores, or updating them to create an ironic counterpoint to the original (classic examples are Robert Altman's *The Long Goodbye* [1973] and Philip Kaufman's *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* [1978]; more recently one could cite Jonathan Demme's *The Manchurian Candidate* [2004]). And then there is the current vogue for the remake as hollow exercise in spectacle and marketing, which is not without interest for the cultural historian, especially when one sees what gets done to Hollywood blockbusters when transmuted in the powerhouse crucibles of the Bollywood and Hong Kong movie industries.

In his fascination with the tropes of vanished genres of commercial filmmaking at least as much as with great films of the past, Maddin's production is closer in spirit to the latter sort of borrowing.[32] Not only in his ongoing fixation on melodrama, but in the technologies he resurrects and the genres he adapts (war movies in *Archangel*; mountain films in *Careful*; fairy tales in *Twilight of the Ice Nymphs*; the musical in the unfilmed *Dykemaster's Daughter* and *Saddest Song*; noir and hockey films in *Cowards*), Maddin remains intensely engaged in an unholy matrimony between the avant-garde and the popular. It is not as if Maddin wishes he could actually have made movies in the twenties. "I never claimed that living in the past would be better than living now."[33] The vertical integration of the studios' heyday militated against any leeway in the sphere of production, distribution, and exhibition at least as much as the multinational media conglomerates do today. Life is arguably better today for a marginal filmmaker working on microscopic budgets as Maddin; in the twenties he would have had to rely on rich patrons. Where there was play in the cinema then and still is today is overwhelmingly in the reception, which cannot ever be wholly controlled, and where viewers are free to find in a film whatever they want—certainly Maddin could not have predicted the year-long run of *Gimli* in New York, nor was whatever cult vibe the audience was picking up on likely to have been among the ones he had planned for. Freed of preconceptions of quality and integrity, Maddin's voracious and omnivorous consumption of the cinematic past has the potential to liberate his viewers from timeworn categories of cinematic quality without releasing them into a void of ironic slumming.

As he puts it in what unintentionally reads like a manifesto for a new conception of cinematic history,

> Because film is both a business and an art form, it always struck me that business needs to be fed by technology, and it's so fast that it moves along to the next technological advance before all the artistic potential has even begun to be wrung out of any particular era. So I always see myself as going back along the road of film history and picking up all these great and completely abandoned technologies and film vocabularies, which I pick up and try on and learn to speak. For instance, the most salient one would be when sound came in. It's not just a technological thing; it was an economic thing. The technology to make sound movies was there from about 1895, actually. It was just a matter of economically converting all the theaters didn't seem worthwhile to distributors until around 1928, but the silent film era wasn't even close to peaking in its artistic potential then, so mime was quickly abandoned. It was cut down in its prime, cut down in its youth even, so mime and mime comedy and mime melodrama were all euthanized and replaced with a new breed of film that had its own charms, and then the evolution really started fast and musicals came in as a new form and they were quickly deemed cloying and abandoned, even though they hadn't achieved their potential. And the most extreme and manqué forms are 3-D and Odorama and Surround-o-vision. When a painter makes a painting, he or she can use any color or any kind of pigment, doesn't even have to use paint. When a poet makes a poem, they can use any word from any language or even make one up, so it seems to me a filmmaker should have the same freedom to use whatever is out there to make movies: old, new vocabularies, humble technologies, sophisticated ones.[34]

Outmoded technologies, "abandoned" film vocabularies, and failed gimmicks are not simply novelties to be resurrected as historical curiosities or for a quick laugh; they are untapped potential-

ities for new modes of filmmaking, available to anyone able to break free of the sealed-off meaning given them by the march of history. To defuse the ideology of progress is a quintessentially modernist idea, and although Maddin gives no sign of having read its chief proponent, Walter Benjamin, there is no doubt that he has assimilated its lessons. After all, what child ever truly wants to grow up?

In many ways, Maddin's acclaimed short, *The Heart of the World* (2001), is an object lesson in the aesthetic practice defended in the quotation above: an occult core of *Metropolis* and *Nosferatu* drenched in Eisenstein, Pudovkin and Vertov and topped with a bona fide Hollywood ending. Still, less than their cinematic innovations, Maddin takes from the Soviet filmmakers the dated iconography of utopia, the constructivist faith in machines and in technological progress. As the flimsy sets are shaken by the earthquake caused by the earth's fatal heart attack, one cannot but recall Maddin's oft-told story of melting and setting fire to action figures of the astronaut Ed White, timed, according to *The Child without Qualities*, to coincide with the patriotic fervor of Canada's Centennial.[35] Children are enthralled to an equal degree by the clean, smooth surfaces of the new and by the potential for disrupting those same surfaces. So, *The Heart of the World* invokes both the astounding promise of the Soviet twenties and the ominous undercurrents of the Weimar Republic. And while the final transformation of Anna's telescope into a movie projector from the earth's core recalls Leni Riefenstahl in its martial and athletic display of flags and bodies, and Vertov's *kino-eye* in its repetition of "Kino" as the new mantra of the reprieved world, the stirring image is the director's own, a world made new by Maddin's modernist magic.

Herein lies his riposte at Hollywood, for as Quandt observes, the Sviridov composition that propels the film forwards also makes it feel like a music video.[36] The driving energy and extraordinary synchronization of image and sound primarily account for the film's seductive power. The movie is simultaneously nostalgic for modernism—the boundless potential of a new medium and a revolution, an apparatus capable of changing the world, an aesthetics with heady claims to relevance in the making of history, an atmosphere of genuine emotion and sincerity—and eager to appropriate the most marginalized artifacts and credos for its own minor art.[37] Maddin's retro-modernist art would not simply create a counter-cinema to Hollywood, but, in the manner of the old avant-gardes, would melt down Hollywood and counter-Hollywood together in a crucible of melodrama to mould them into something entirely new. Given that the globalization of the film industry has for all practical purposes accomplished the same recasting on its own terms, Maddin's quixotic but strangely plausible quest to explain why Winnipeg may lie at the heart of the world is a timely reminder of the many different ways in which it is possible to march forward while keeping one's eyes fixed on the riveting detritus piling up in the past, the raw material of some unforeseen future *kino*.
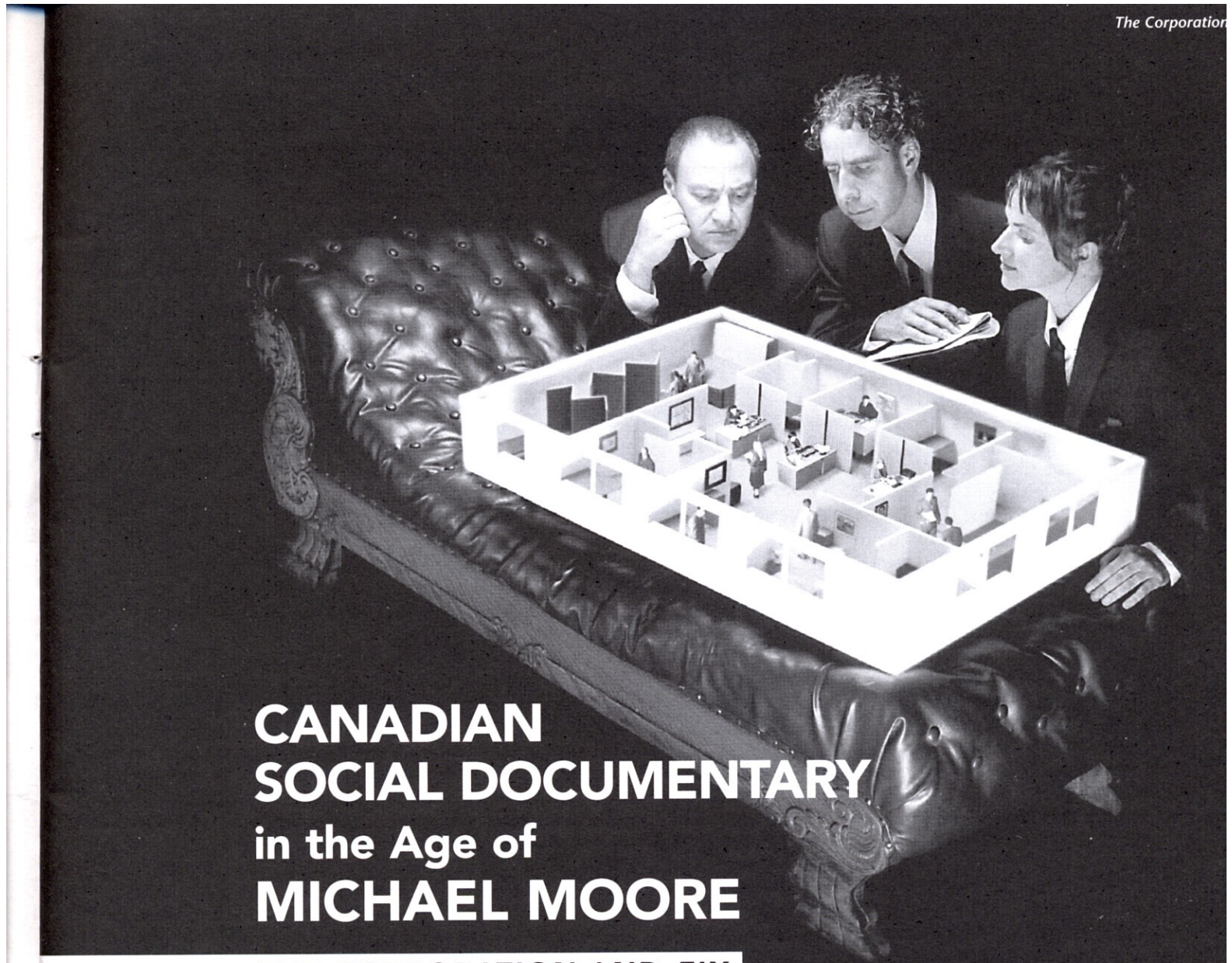
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NOTES

1. Guy Maddin speaking in *Waiting for Twilight* (directed by Noam Gonick, 1997); qtd. in Caelum Vatsndal, *Kino Delirium: The Films of Guy Maddin* [Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publications, 2000], 123.
2. On Harvie, see in particular *Waiting for Twilight* and Maddin's nomination of this "perfervid anachronist, fixated on all things 1920s" as "a great genius we've never heard of" in an interview with Scott Shrake in *Used Wigs* (accessed September 2004): http://www.usedwigs.com/interview_maddin.html.
3. Maddin in Marie Losier and Richard Porton, "The Pleasures of Melancholy: An Interview with Guy Maddin," *Cineaste* (Summer 2004): 18-25, at 23.
4. Maddin, "Sad Songs Say So Much," *The Village Voice* (May 7-13, 2003; accessed September, 2004): http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/0319/maddin.php.
5. Maddin, "Twilight of the Ice Nymphs," *The Village Voice* (March 3-9, 2004; accessed September, 2004): http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/0409/maddin.php; "Wait until Dark," *The Village Voice* (April 5, 2004; accessed September, 2004): http://www.villagevoice.com/issues/0414/maddin.php. See also the account of the ADR work for *Twilight* with Alice Krige and Pascale Bussières (Vatsndal, 119).
6. Maddin, *From the Atelier Tovar: Selected Writings* (Toronto: Coach House Books, 2003), 15-64, 115-61, 209-28. The journals span fifteen years, but are concentrated in 1996, 1998-2000, and 2002.
7. Maddin, "You Give Me Fever," *The Village Voice* (June 12-18, 2002); rpt. *Atelier Tovar*, 84-6, at 86. See also "Pleasures of Melancholy," 24.
8. For a summary of the argument for Maddin as camp, Steven Shaviro, "Fire and Ice: The Films of Guy Maddin," in *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema Since 1980*, ed. William Beard and Jerry White (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2002), 216-21, at 217.
9. For Gonick's comment, see his interview with Maddin, "Happy Ever After," *The Village Voice* (January 23-29, 2002); rpt. in *Atelier Tovar*, 80-83, at 83.
10. Maddin in interview with Robert Enright, "Chicken Soup for the Stone Baby: Interrogations for an Autobiography," in Maddin, *Cowards Bend the Knee* (Toronto: The Power Plant, 2003), 129-51, at 145.
11. Maddin, "The Womb Is Barren," *Montage* (Winter 2001); rpt. *Atelier Tovar*, 87-90, at 90.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid. 87.
14. Maddin, *The Child without Qualities*, in *Atelier Tovar*, 176-208, at 177.
15. Vatnsdal, *Kino Delirium*, 30.
16. R. George Godwin, "Far from the Maddin Crowd: Thirty Years of the Winnipeg Film Group," *cinemascope* 20 (Fall 2004): 14-18, at 17.
17. "Pleasures of Melancholy," 21.
18. George Melnyk, *One Hundred Years of Canadian Cinema* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 199.
19. For the quotation, see "Pleasures of Melancholy," 22. For the production locations, see Vatnsdal, *Kino Delirium*, 7, 50; Maddin, "Twilight."
20. See Melnyk's discussion of *Archangel* (*Hundred Years*, 195).
21. Ibid.
22. Maddin, *The Eye, Like a Strange Balloon, Mounts towards Infinity*, in *Atelier Tovar*, 164-68, at 164.
23. James Quandt, "Purple Majesty: Guy Maddin talks with James Quandt," *Artforum* (June 2003): web version, accessed September 2004, http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_10_41/ai_103989792/pg_2.
24. Ibid.
25. Maddin, *Child without Qualities*, 187.
26. Ibid., 188.
27. Maddin, qtd. in John Anderson, *Film Comment* 34:2 (March/April 1998): 63-67, at 67.
28. It wasn't until I was in college, for example, that I discovered that *The Wizard of Oz* switched to color when Dorothy left Kansas—my myriad viewings had only ever been its annual network television screening on our family's old black-and-white television.
29. See also Quandt and Maddin's discussion of the theme of resurrection in "Purple Majesty."
30. Ibid..
31. Maddin, "Guilty Pleasures," *Film Comment* (January/February 2003); rpt. *Atelier Tovar*, 96-8.
32. Indeed, even Maddin's sense of Canadian cinema combines the local with the Hollywood. "I earned a painful but desperately needed $750," his journal reads, "for a one-hour lecture on Canada's cinema century – showing clips from the two great Canadians: Lipsett and Lauzon. Then, clips from *Leave Her to Heaven*, *Written on the Wind*, *Strange Illusion* and *Dishonoured*. Canadian cinema has been a history of absence. This is what we missed!" ("Journal Two, 1998-1999," in *Atelier Tovar*, 115-61, at 158).
33. "Pleasures of Melancholy," 21.
34. Maddin, in Andrea Meyer, "Melodrama As a Way of Life: Guy Maddin and Isabella Rossellini Talk about *Saddest Song*," indieWIRE (3 May 2004, accessed September 2004): http://www.indiewire.com/people/people_040503maddin.html.
35. Maddin, *Child without Qualities*, 194; see also Vatsndal, 28.
36. "Purple Majesty."
37. On Maddin's interest in minor movements and their relation to his own Winnipeg aesthetic in *Careful*, see Darrell Varga, "Desire in Bondage: Maddin's *Careful*," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies / Revue Canadienne d'Études Cinématographiques* 8:2 (Fall 1999): 56-70, at 66-8; and Will Straw, "Reinhabiting Lost Languages: Guy Maddin's *Careful*," in Gene Walz, ed. *Canada's Best Features: Critical Essays on 15 Canadian Films* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 304-317. Although I disagree with Varga's and Straw's underestimation of the role of Hollywood in Maddin's filmmaking, I agree with their distinction of Maddin's use of cinematic history from the strategies of camp.

CANADIAN SOCIAL DOCUMENTARY
in the Age of
MICHAEL MOORE

THE CORPORATION AND FIX

BY SETH FELDMAN

Canadian documentary today finds itself in the best and worst of times. There are more films being made than ever and more people – some 14,000 or so – involved in the making of them. The National Film Board, thanks to Commissioner Jacques Bensimon's sweeping reforms, is back from decades of marginalization. Toronto's Hot Docs Festival is on its way to becoming one of the world's premiere documentary showcases. The number of Canadian documentaries being made and the percentage of total Canadian production they represent continues to rise – and is likely to rise further still when recent tax changes in the US and a rising dollar rob Canada of its "runaway productions."

At the same time, there is some question to what is actually being made under the designation of "documentary." Public subsidies essential for documentary filmmaking are being channeled through

broadcasters. The result is that much of the documentary community spends much of its time providing accounts of home makeovers, cooking shows and even less savory manifestations of reality television. Documentary budgets have fallen, on average, by a third and the once proud profession is quickly becoming a very poor one.

The good times and bad times of Canadian documentary are taking place amid the re-invention of theatrical, point of view documentary, largely thanks to Michael Moore's demonstration of how profitable this niche can be. It's reality's turn, a point Moore hopes to underline by having his *Fahrenheit 9/11* succeed *Lord of the Rings* as the Academy's Best Picture. In his wake, we are beginning to see a documentary in every Cineplex and an audience for many more documentaries.

What's a Canadian to do? Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbot and Joel Bakan's *The Corporation* and Nettie Wild's *Fix: The Story of an Addicted City* are two strategies for the documentary in the age of Michael Moore and, not coincidently, two of the most successful Canadian documentaries in recent years.

The Corporation is, of the two films, the closest to the Michael Moore school of documentary. This is not to say that the filmmakers are working in a Canadian branch plant of the booming Michael Moore industry. Achbar in particular, established his own style and reputation in 1992 with *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media*, a film he co-directed with Peter Wintonick and a film that was, until *The Corporation*, the most widely seen Canadian documentary. Nevertheless, *The Corporation* benefits from the retro ideal of documentary as rhetorical statement – underlined by the appearance of Moore himself as one of the film's major interview subjects.

Based on Joel Bakan's book of the same name, *The Corporation* follows a rhetorical strategy that is more rigorous and more linear than Moore's. It is divided into three one-hour sections (partially to facilitate its presentation on its two sponsoring channels, TV Ontario and Vision TV).

Part one is designed to provide a provocative exposition of the problem. If corporations are legal persons, the filmmakers ask, what sort of persons are they? The film answers that question by showing us in a step-by-step argument that corporations as they exist today neatly fit the World Health Organization's criteria of a psychotic personality. The second part of the film is more forward looking, documenting corporate practices that will make it ever more difficult to extract ourselves from their domination. Part three moves toward solutions. It begins by documenting the collusion between corporations and dictatorial governments, i.e. what we are up against. The film then provides examples of social activism moving from a bloody popular uprising in Bolivia to its least surprising moment, an American town hall meeting where young activists from central casting say the right things.

All three parts of the film are divided into sub-sections, each designed to elaborate on a particular point or case study. Within these, the film offers an unending stream of largely archival footage, some of it horrific, some ironic (there is much made of post-War industrial and educational films) that is edited with unending precision to a voiceover commentary delivered by the anonymous narrator (Mikela J. Mikael). The only break in this montage are the talking heads: post-Seattle activists, repentant, semi-repentant and unrepentant CEO's, economists from both sides, Noam Chomsky and, of course, Michael Moore. The film's argument is also underscored, quite literally, by Velcrow Ripper's evocative music track.

The Corporation's argument, posited as it is within this tight structure, is reminiscent of the Film Board's first work, expositions of world geo-politics bearing John Grierson's stamp of approval. Grierson and his mentor, Walter Lippman, might well have argued with the politics of *The Corporation*, but they would have no argument with the fact that it has an overarching political agenda. *The Corporation* argues that the corporation is the most powerful institution of our time and, by implication, that the film must bank on its own power to take it on.

Achbar and Abbot do, in fact, fight PowerPoint with PowerPoint. As the film concludes, there is no hope of dispensing with the corporation altogether. Rather one must simply make it subservient to higher ideals. The same is true with the language of corporate efficiency. Corporate iconography – and its glitzy presentation – go head to head with the film's equally iconographic visuals.

Like the corporations, *The Corporation* has its own logo and is also selling a lifestyle. There is, toward the end of the film, an evocative montage of a post-corporate nirvana in which wind generators spin and nature returns. Activism is a buy-in to that lifestyle the way that the wearing of corporate logos is buy-in to the other. Nor is *The Corporation* limited to a single product, the film that will leave us when the lights come up. Instead, the filmmakers have set up a website (http://www.thecorporation.tv/) providing news about the film's screenings, favourable reviews, and updates on the stories we have seen. The site links to *iCorp*, an activist anti-Corporate group, *Docback*, an online magazine, and a store at which one might purchase both Bakan's book and a sweatshop free t-shirt.

The Corporation exists in a kind of international corporate space that is perhaps an intentional mirroring of its subject. References in the film are North American rather than Canadian or American. When the directors need images of the seats of government, we see in quick succession both the capitol dome in Washington and the Peace Tower in Ottawa. The corporate logos and CEOs are almost entirely American, though when the camera takes us inside the Summit of the Americas meeting in Quebec City, the government and corporate leaders chatting ever so amiably amid the riots are all Canadian. To a Canadian, of course, this cross-border mélange merely mirrors the nightly news. In the United States, where the film is now widely distributed, equating a neo-gothic tower with the very idea of government might well require a less obvious reading.

The last word in *The Corporation* goes to Michael Moore who both acknowledges and validates the corporate structuring of the anti-corporation movement. He muses as to why the corporations that back his films and television program put up with him and concludes that they have their eye on the revenue he generates while believing that audiences have already been acculturated into passivity. Moore ends the film by asking the audience to get off its collective couch and prove his sponsors wrong.

That's one strategy.

A second is Nettie Wild's in *Fix: The Story of an Addicted City*. Wild, a former actor and broadcaster, has made three other films since 1988, all of them direct cinema studies characterized by her personal presence within a complex confrontation. Wild's best known film to date has been *A Place Called Chiapas* (1999) made in the aftermath of the 1994 Zapatista revolution. The film is an anatomy of the peasant rebellion itself and of the role of an outside observer of social conflict. In one sequence of the film, the enigmatic Subcommandante Marcos invites sympathizers from North America and Europe to visit his "postmodern revolution." Wild films the political tourists with various degrees of bemusement but also with a growing realization that she herself is just another visitor. When she finally is granted her interview with Marcos, the resulting footage says as much about the awkwardness

Fix

of the encounter as it does about the nature of the revolution.

It is with this same sense of non-detached irony that Wild films a small revolution in her own city. *Fix* documents the personalities and events that surround efforts to improve the horrendous lives of heroin and cocaine addicts in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Wild keeps herself off screen in the film but she does have a kind of alter-ego in Ann Livingston, a non-addict, who is a co-founder of the Vancouver Area Network of Drug Users (VANDU), a drug users' advocacy group. Livingston is organized, tough and determined to replace Vancouver's sporadic and purposeless persecution of the addicts with a more rational and supportive program. More pointedly, she is out to save lives in Canada's densest population of HIV-positive persons.

One of the lives Livingston is trying to save is that of Dean Wilson, a charming and articulate former IBM salesman and long time heroin user. Wilson is President of VANDU and together with Livingston works to open a safe injection site. "Together" as we discover well into the film is a complex term as Livingston and Wilson are also trying to work out the emotional intricacies of their personal lives together as partners.

The struggle itself has both its iconographic moments and its surprises. There are the demonstrations and the villain in the person of a particularly unctuous businessman. The surprises are far more interesting. The adjacent Chinese community who are organized by our villain to oppose the drug reforms, also have a case. Not only do they feel their businesses are jeopardized but their culture itself has been the long time victim of an imposed drug culture. Even the police are human, one constable refusing to be type cast as he lists the addicts' lives he has saved in the neighbourhood that morning.

But the biggest surprise of the film is Phillip Owen, the conservative mayor of Vancouver, who becomes VANDU's most powerful ally. Owen's motives may well be pragmatic – the war on drugs

isn't working and safe injection sites have, in European cities, lowered the body count. As Wild shows, though, his commitment is genuine as he faces down his own city council and, as it turns out (though we don't see this in the film), loses his job over his drug policy reforms.

Wild presents all of this, from Livingston and Wilson's home life to interviews with addicts on the street, from a classic direct cinema eye-to-eye stance. Events and the film itself take their own time to unfold. Livingston and Wilson's totally illegal safe injection site is set up, used for an undisclosed period of time, and closes when they are evicted by the landlord. Sometime during the film's timeframe, Wilson goes to Europe to learn about similar sites. There are hearings at City Hall and a report is written. Its recommendations seem to be in limbo when the film ends.

If Wild's laid back structure is the opposite of Achbar's corporate organization, it is equally appropriate for its topic. The lifestyle she examines has never lent itself to organized examination or systematic change. Streets we see in the film are the same streets on which Allan King filmed the alcoholics of *Skidrow* in 1956. The injection site is at best a partial fix. As Livingston tells a chirpy reporter early in the film, medical recovery programs are about three per cent effective. Wilson illustrates this later in the film when he tries again and fails again to kick his habit.

Like *The Corporation*, *Fix* keeps going after the lights come on. Wild has taken the film to more than 40 Canadian cities, where she has booked theatres and invited policy makers, police, local activists and addicts to post-screening forums. They have used the screenings as fundraising events. The street is their website (as is http://www.canadawildproductions.com). Like the film itself, the street wends slowly in the right direction.

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GAY GUERRILLA FILMMAKING and TERRORIST CHIC

Bruce LaBruce

TORONTO FILMMAKER BRUCE LABRUCE DISCUSSES HIS LATEST ART/PORN FEATURE, THE RASPBERRY REICH

BY MATTHEW HAYS

Some of the most exciting contemporary queer work is emanating from Canada. The Great White North has spawned what seems a small army of gender/cinema revolutionaries, from the exemplary documentary work of Lynne Fernie and Aerlyn Weissman in *Forbidden Love* to the formal experimentation of John Greyson to the theatrical adaptations of Robert Lepage.

Among them is Bruce LaBruce, who has forged his own path of cultural fusion, marrying hardcore pornography with arthouse traditions, creating a rich and varied oeuvre that has remained largely low-budget and from the trenches. His sensibility can be traced back to Toronto's '80s punk scene, where LaBruce was so appalled by the homophobia of that underground milieu he produced a series of zines to challenge the attitude. His first film, *No Skin Off My Ass*, was an erotic punk fable, and an odd ode to Sandy Dennis's performance in Robert Altman's *That Cold Day in the Park*. He has continued to write and direct sexually explicit films, including the semi-autobiographical *Super 8 1/2* and *Hustler White* (which starred Tony Ward). With his two most recent films, LaBruce has further pushed the envelope of his own art/porn or homocore sub-genre, making *Skin Flick*, a film that involves race-related violent rape between gay men of colour and neo-Nazis, and *The Raspberry Reich*, about sexually experimenting German terrorists, in double versions: one, for hardcore porn distribution, and the other, more softcore version, for the festival circuit and repertory cinema distribution. In *The Raspberry Reich*, with multiple nods to Dusan Makavejev's *W.R. Mysteries of the Organism*, LaBruce takes on the radical left, concocting a merry band of sexual renegades who fashion themselves on the infamous Baader-Meinhof gang, the most notorious band of post-WWII German terrorists. The film itself is alternately hilarious, erotic and disturbing; creatively and stylistically speaking, it is as though Bertolt Brecht, Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Radley Metzger are having a threesome.

As well, LaBruce has worked extensively as a photographer, and was one of the co-founders of the film journal you are now holding in your hands. He sat down with CineAction to talk about politics, making *Raspberry Reich* and his thoughts on *Team America*.

Hays: It seems *The Raspberry Reich* couldn't be more timely, what with the Bush victory. It seems we really are ready for a gay Intifada.

Bruce LaBruce: I think so too. I'm really hocking the T-shirts now which have slogans about the gay intifada on them. It's perfect timing.

Hays: You've said it's almost better that Bush got elected than Kerry.

LaBruce: It probably would have been disastrous for the Democratic Party, not that I really care about the Democratic Party, but they would have been inheriting this unwinnable war and a huge deficit and probably another terrorist attack. It's probably better that Bush be left to deal with it. They'll mess it up and that will usher in a Democratic regime. But you know the Democrats are more conservative than our Conservative Party is, so it's not much of a choice. It seems the whole system must be destroyed!

Hays: I find it ironic, because they're saying that the issue of gay marriage pushed many into Bush's camp, and yet the people who are pushing for gay marriage are often gay conservatives.

LaBruce: It was a total wedge issue, along with stem-cell research. It's typical of navel-gazing gays to think that their little struggle is more important than saving the world. I don't believe in gay marriage anyway. Obviously, I believe in civil unions and equal rights under the law, but to try to have it sanctified, it's totally unnecessary. I hate gay conservatives as much as I hate hip-hop corporate blacks who have loads of money and claim to represent the interests

No Skin Off My Ass
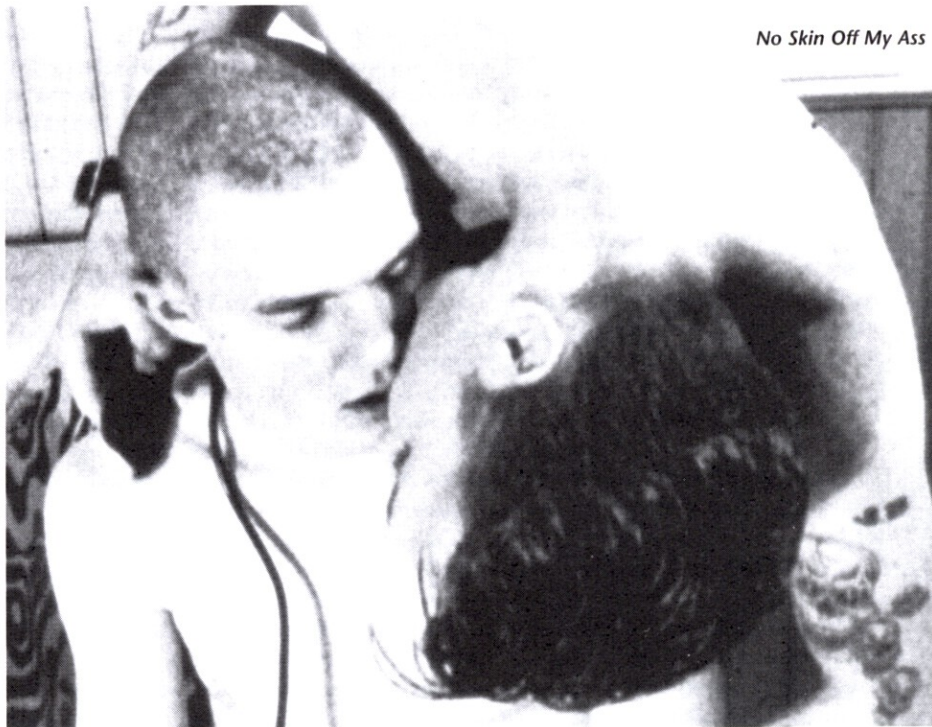
of disenfranchised low-income blacks. Driving around in Bentleys and drinking champagne. It's really the oppressed becoming the oppressor. Which is my favourite theme.

Hays: Why did you choose the Baader-Meinhof gang?
LaBruce: The Baader-Meinhof were the most glamorous terrorists. They wore leather jackets and drove BMWs. They were very style conscious, they had a hip look. They came out of the '60s and had that student protest energy behind them. They were intellectuals. Ulrike Meinhof was an academic before she became a terrorist. There were rumours that Andreas Baader was a male prostitute before he became a terrorist. All these things combined to give them a mystique. When I was a punk in the '80s they were very compelling. My friends and I all read *Hitler's Children*, by Jillian Becker, which gave their whole history. I have a bit of German blood in me. My producer happens to be from Berlin, and that has meant that I've had a pretty strong connection over the past 14 years with that city. I find it intriguing that the Germans went from this Aryan uber power to a kind of downtrodden group. All the shame they've suffered through because of the Holocaust, there's a certain humility many of them have. It feels that they've really learned a lesson, and yet they still have that German pride about them, an ego. It's an interesting psychology that they have, a restrained ego.

Hays: I read your work as deeply ironic. With this film, and with your last film, *Skin Flick*, are you ever concerned about how certain audiences might interpret it?
LaBruce: I don't see it as ironic, I think of it as paradoxical. I always make the distinction. Irony or sarcasm is saying one thing and meaning the exact opposite. Paradox is saying two things that seem to be contradictory but are nonetheless true. With all of my work, if I seem to be sarcastic, I'm probably not. There's usually some ambiguity there. I hope that comes through in the film. On one hand it seems to be critiquing and sending up and taking the piss out of the radical left, but on the other it's clear that I'm quite sympathetic with many of their views. So there's a bit of tension there and people don't know exactly where I'm positioning myself, which I think is a good way to make a movie. I think I don't even know where I'm positioning myself. When I went to *Team America: World Police*, I had heard it was a very right-wing film, that they had gone in a very politically-incorrect direction with it. But when I saw it, I just thought it was hilarious. The way they attacked sanctimonious left-leaning Hollywood stars, who probably hurt Kerry's campaign more than they helped it because of their pomposity and presumptions. That they really think they have any idea what's going on when they live in Hollywood

dementia is ridiculous. When they were getting blown away at the end I was cheering.

Hays: Some critics on the lib-left were quite uncomfortable with that. Jim Hober-man in the *Voice*, Liam Lacey in the *Globe and Mail*.

LaBruce: I thought it was great. I mean, come on, we live in a world with celebrity boxing and celebrity deathmatch, that cartoon. I found it quite cathartic to see Helen Hunt blown away.

Hays: Some felt it was ultimately a right-wing film, but Team America itself was a group of ludicrously jingoistic soldiers, who had no idea that blowing up the Eiffel Tower was an overextension and misuse of their power.

LaBruce: I know. And their leader is basically a pervert who tricks the other character into giving him a blowjob. It goes after everybody, which is what I like to do too. With *Skin Flick* I went after the extreme right wing, and with *Rasberry Reich* the extreme left wing. Some were freaked out with *Skin Flick* because I represented the neo-Nazi skinheads with more sympathy than I did the bourgeois gay couple. But then the skinheads were critiqued again, when the female character pointed out to them that they were essentially a bunch of faggots, pointing to their hypocrisy and contradictions.

Hays: You have had two versions of both of your most recent films, so you must think about audience when you're making a film.

LaBruce: Honestly, I made the last two films for porn companies with the stipulation that I would be able to make more softcore, more narrative-heavy versions of the films. And that then they would have also a hardcore version that they could market to a different audience. It's just a little experiment to make things this way. If I made a full-on hardcore version, with long sex scenes, which is what porn conventions dictate and how it's consumed, they wouldn't show on the fest circuit or in cinemas because it's considered too, like, pornographic.

Hays: It's fascinating that you have this considerable Japanese teen girl following.

LaBruce: There's a lot of speculation about why Japanese girls like western gay male products, movies, books and comics. I just think that they find it a genre that they relate to, partly because it's about damaged characters, or characters who are delicate. I think they relate to the feminized male in different ways.

Hays: The complications surrounding any shoot must be more difficult when the shoot is pornography. I heard you got kicked out of a couple of places where you were shooting.

LaBruce: There was this central location we had in east Berlin, this apartment, where someone was moving out and they let us use it

"This is Bruceploitation" insert in *Suspect* magazine

before their lease was up. We went to the trouble of putting up those huge blowups of Che Guevara everywhere. We were shooting sex scenes in the elevator, and we also had people running in and out of the building wearing ski masks and carrying guns. We didn't have any permits, so people started to freak out a bit in the building, because, you know, if you see people running around in ski masks carrying guns in your apartment hallway, it tends to scare people these days. Otherwise, though, you can get away with stuff in Berlin that you could never get away with in New York. When we were shooting the scene where the four terrorists are doing the kidnapping, and they're wearing masks and carrying guns by the car, a cop car drove by and didn't even stop.

Hays: It's an alternative lifestyle.

LaBruce: Exactly.

Hays: How do you find working with porn actors?

LaBruce: I really like it and I get really irritated with some people harping on how bad the acting is in my movies. It's like, have you ever seen a Warhol movie, or a John Waters movie, or a Paul Morrissey movie? There's an actual appreciation of bad acting or non-actors acting. So what if the actors don't stay within the lines of the colouring book when you're acting? There are these rules around suspension of disbelief that are absurd. It's a given that they're non actors. Acting in porn is acting, but they're never real-

ly challenged beyond basic lines. I try to get them involved creatively and in the process and make sure that they know what the movie's about. The challenge is to get them to give a performance. I'm not trying to make them professional actors, but their interpretation of the roles is important. Some people think the performances are fine, even by professional acting standards, and some people can't get past the bad acting. I actually like the notion of bad acting.

Hays: It's very Brechtian, because the performances draw attention to the filmmaking process.
LaBruce: Yes. I post-dubbed the entire movie, and four of the main characters were dubbed by someone else. Pretty much everyone in Germany speaks English, but their English isn't always that good.

Hays: I think the post-dubbing was very intriguing, because it gave a further sense of distance with the characters, of everyone being disembodied.
LaBruce: Yeah, and I knew I was going to have to dub it when we were making it, but I was fine with it. With some of them, their second language was Russian, not English, so I got the sense that they were simply saying the lines phonetically and didn't even understand what they were saying, sort of like Abba used to. It ended up working, surprisingly. I had hoped it would give it the feeling of a '70s exploitation movie. In terms of casting, I think of myself as an availabalist. I work with whatever I have, whatever are within my means.

Hays: You've said you think most pornography is innately fascistic.
LaBruce: The fact that so much of it is so univocal, so relentless, sure. But I actually think the porn world is this sort of collective unconscious, where people work out their dark or politically incorrect fantasies. In that respect it doesn't have the same kind of morality you'd expect in certain mainstream representations. It's based on sexual power and submission and domination, and those things are played out regardless of race or gender. It's rare to see that in the pop culture. Racially based fantasies are rare in mainstream culture, but you see them in porn. All those things that are cleaned up in the public discourse are fair game in pornography. I guess that's not fascist, but amoral. It's about sexual power dynamics. In terms of gay porn, I think it's fascist in that it has that same iconography as the Third Reich: the idea of the perfect body. It's body fascism. They're often fucking like pistons, it's very mechanical. It's that kind of fascism, like Leni Riefenstahl's *Olympiad*.

Hays: I certainly thought a lot about *W.R. Mysteries of the Organism* as I watched The Rasberry Reich.
LaBruce: That was my primary influence. I literally stole whole scenes from *W.R.* But that's how I make most of my films, is by just taking bits and pieces of other films and putting them together. That scene of the two guys kissing in the street, was an homage to the scene in *W.R.* with Jackie Curtis and her boyfriend, eating ice-cream cones on the street.

Hays: Like *Mysteries of the Organism*, you juxtapose shots that are erotic with images that are violent and disturbing. There's a photo you did that's up on your web site that I find very disturbing, of two men, one giving the other a blow job, and they are both covered in blood, or what appears to be blood. You have told the story of getting beaten up by a punk years ago, but finding it hot later.
LaBruce: I used to get beaten up by punks. I had a boyfriend at one point who was a hustler who was involved in the punk scene and we saw each other for a while. I bumped into him a year later

and he'd become a neo-Nazi skinhead. He needed a place to stay, and I didn't really know how into it he was, so I put him up. I kept on trying to ridicule him for his views and beliefs and talk him out of it. He got fed up with me one night and beat the crap out of me. So I kicked him out. There was definitely a sexual dimension to it.

Hays: There seems to be a direct correlation between who was slamming our head in a locker in high school and who we find sexy now. It's like the Stockholm Syndrome or something.
LaBruce: Sure. So many gay black men have contacted me about the scene in *Skin Flick* where the black character gets raped by the white skinhead and said they found it incredibly hot. It really turns some people's crank. I go out with a Muslim now. The dynamic of going out with someone who's a devout Muslim from the east, when you're born in the Christian west. There's a whole load of social signifiers that arrive in the bedroom. You can't divorce the sexual act from historical and political realities when you're dealing with people from two different cultures and races and backgrounds.

Hays: So who ties who up?
LaBruce: I'm openly bottom. Some people say that they're versatile. But I'm a bottom.

Hays: It's funny that you relate filmmaking to a terrorist act, which relates to Fassbinder's famous quote, when he said, 'I don't throw bombs, I make movies.'
LaBruce: When we were making the film, I really got the sense of what it might be like to be in the Baader-Meinhof gang. It was guerrilla filmmaking, we had to make everything on the cheap, on the fly, without permits, running around the city with guns, trying to be secret, getting found out and then getting kicked out of places. In one place where we shot, a bunch of kids found out that a porn movie was being shot, so they climbed the trees to peer in the window at our shoot. So it felt like we were under surveillance. Even on that level, the whole thing felt like a terrorist act. Just to manage to make a porn film about terrorism and get it shown at major film festivals feels like a coup.

Hays: Three prominent filmmakers released their carefully timed films in an effort to sway the electorate in the US election: Michael Moore *(Fahrenheit 9/11)*, John Sayles *(Silver City)* and Mike Leigh *(Vera Drake)*. Do you ever consider making more mainstream films?
LaBruce: I may move in that direction. I'm making another porn movie right now, *L.A. Gangbangers*, about Latino gangs in L.A. It's very much about racial and sexual identity, and will complete the porn trilogy. There's a brown woman in the film who talks like a black woman but wants to be white, because whites are the minority in the world and it's cool to be in a minority so that's why she wants to be white. It's another low-budget art porn movie. But I have a few other things in the works that are in development. For me it's just a process that's very gradual. I would never force myself into something. I let things happen organically. As an artist, I wait for paths to present themselves. It's feasible that I could go in that direction but I think when you're ready to do something you do it.

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Caress, Denial, Decay

QUEER DESIRE IN *THE NATURE OF NICHOLAS*

BY ANDREW LESK

Pairing dark humour with psychological disturbances, Jeff Erbach's *The Nature of Nicholas* (2002) commences with an impulsive kiss. Bobby, whom 12-year-old Nicholas kisses, stands aside, gently wipes his mouth with the back of his hand, and walks off. Those familiar with the thematic genre of youthful desire and transgression might rightly expect the narrative to now focus on how Nicholas might feel ashamed, given the prohibitive weight of what might be construed to be a homosexual "secret." If Nicholas were to embody all the repressive significance of his conservative era—Erbach's dryly textured and isolated mid-20th century Canadian prairie—he might be thought of as leading a double life. And though such clichès describing the fraught nature of circumscribed lives are by far numerous, they are, in *The Nature of Nicholas*, quite appropriate.

Nicolas's kiss, which turns out to be a gesture of inclement desire, does not result in a surreptitious duality; rather, the shame he might feel is literalized in Bobby's, as it were, recharacterization: he splits into two persons. Seeking out his friend the on the day after the incident, Bobby walks along a prairie road, on a bright day with a sun, and among expansive prairie fields that lack depth and breadth. He tells Nicholas he doesn't feel well: "I shouldn't have let you kiss me," suggesting that the surprise kiss was not altogether unwelcome. Yet later, Nicholas discovers that *this* Bobby, who is beginning to turn green, is not the
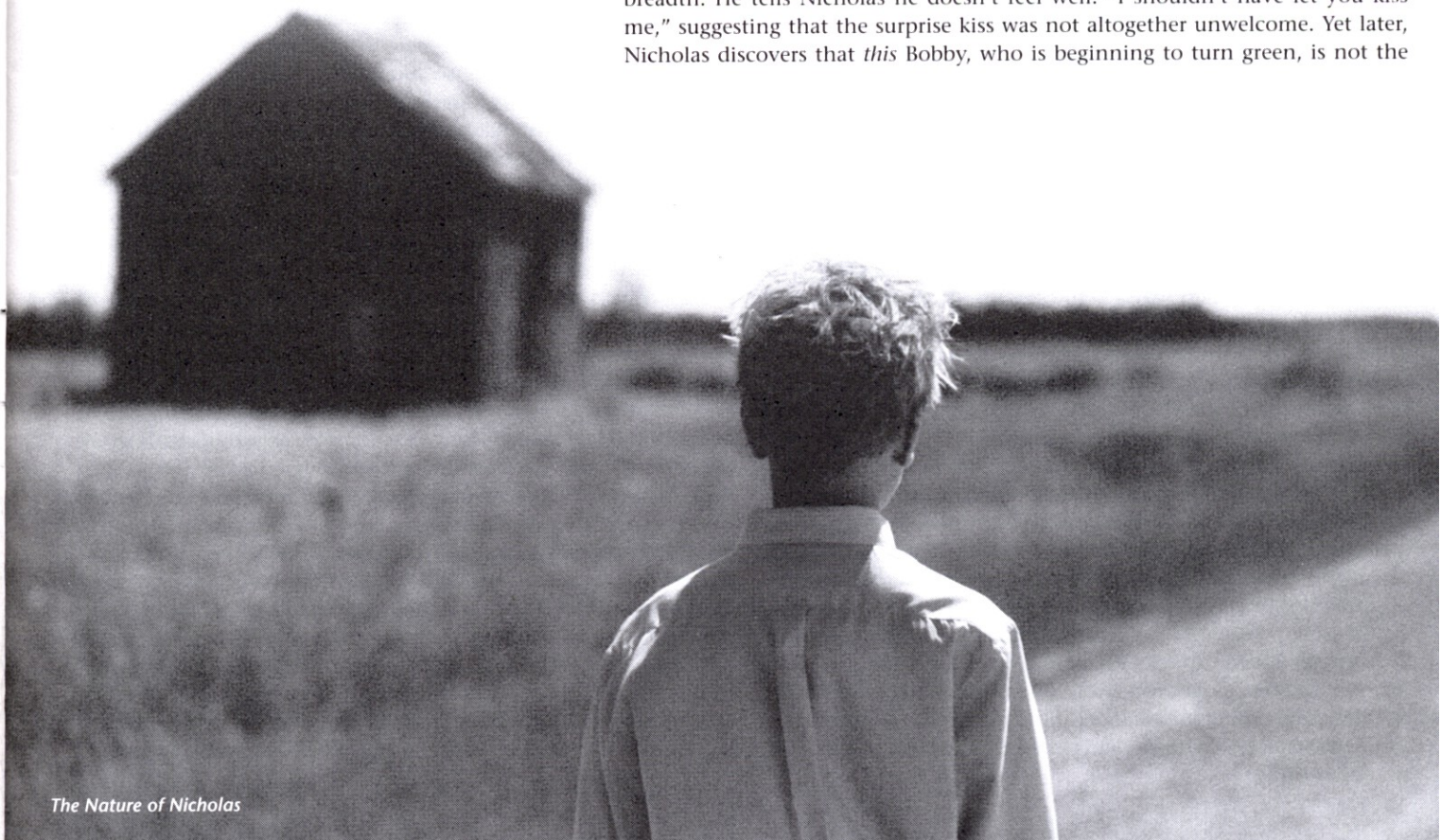
The Nature of Nicholas

real Bobby. Nicholas, though disconcerted, remains one person, whole unto himself. He feels responsible for this decaying Bobby, somehow intuiting that the state of rot must somehow reflect upon his own nature. What Erbach thematizes here is not merely nascent adolescent sexuality, but the shame of being *naturally* different.

This is not to say that Erbach believes that Nicholas possesses a gay *essence* (a position that might vex social constructionists, who believe that sexual identification is mostly a social, rather than biological, construct). But Nicholas's initial inability to think that there might be something wrong with his desire signals how it might be that his *feeling* has been transmitted, much like flu. Through observation and deduction, he is able to come to a conclusion about what his kiss has come to mean.

His kiss, a literal caress, a brush of one surface upon another—skin to skin—is reconfigured metaphorically as the touch of the same: male to male. Since the male-to-male kiss evinces social edicts that prohibit such conduct, Nicholas's world shifts instantaneously from youthful curiosity to the as-yet uncharted realm of adult (self-) regulation. Nicholas's otherness is revealed to him in that the kiss yields social meaning. And the consequences of it, perhaps intimated but never before known, become embodied as the surreal figure that is the decaying Bobby. That Bobby should split into two persons makes no sense to Nicholas, until he is able to better understand the ramifications of his transgression and the nature of his desire.

Erbach compresses Bobby's adolescent desire, an element in constant flux, by extending it as parallel to the repression of mid-20th century Canadian society and, most importantly, as embodying the kind of ambiguity and tentativeness that we find in metaphor. Always a representative of a given thing, metaphor is (in paradoxical Derridean fashion) always *beside* the thing it denotes, although it is also seen to *belong* to it. Erbach's examination of the prohibitive nature of queer adolescent desire is similarly displaced, as the film's treatment of a homosexual theme can only be understood as a representation of a surreptitious desire whose ramifications, if fulfilled, reach beyond the normative. What *Nicholas* critiques, then, is the proposition that if desire among adolescents cannot be accomplished using presumably life-affirming heterosexual expression, it will find an abject manifestation in decay.

Is Erbach's film a gothic-on-the-prairies or "prairie postmodern," an ascription common to the work of those affiliated with the Winnipeg Film Group (see interview)? The overuse of the appellation "gothic" threatens to drench the film with a certain thematic impulse that is not ultimately fully engaged. Nevertheless, the film's slide to horror underpins Nicolas's initial illiteracy in matters both barbarous and fantastic. Though Nicholas does dissect bugs in the shed behind his house, his interest appears to be clinical, much in the same way his impulsive kissing of Bobby seems to be almost experimental. There doesn't appear to be much thought behind what Nicholas does, revealing that he, like any adolescent, tries things on, arbitrarily and without guile. His vacillation in feeling and action relegates him to *surface* observation and touch. In overstepping boundaries, Nicolas
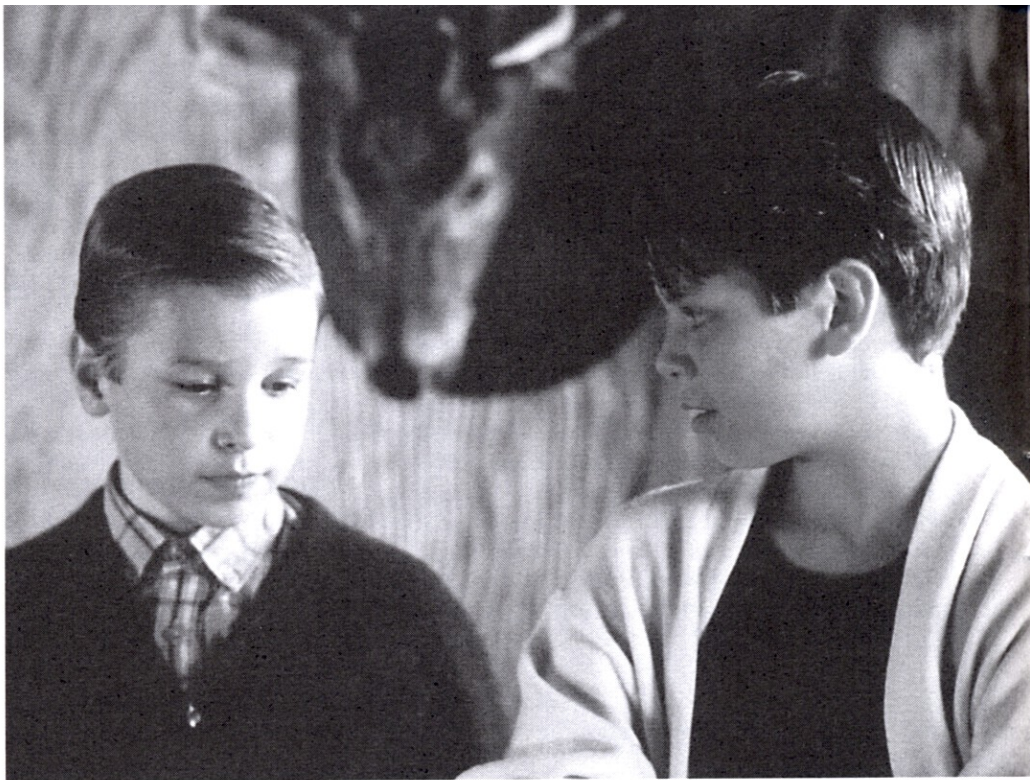
unwittingly creates a metaphoric "reality" of which the second Bobby is the primary manifestation: decay has set in and terror takes root in shadows cast by the decomposing ghoul. Nicholas, whose innocent outlook causes him not to measure the *depth* of possible consequences, must deal with the visible outcome of his expressions of desire.

In explaining how the gothic conventions privilege "metaphors of depth", Eve Sedgwick asserts, while the spatial notion of depth can play a role, "the strongest energies inhere in the surface" Sedgwick goes on to examine how the troubled self, isolated in its efforts to reach that which it might normally have access to, is sundered: "The self and whatever it is that is outside have a proper, natural, necessary connection to each other, but one that the self is suddenly incapable of making"; the result is "a double-ness where singleness should be".[1]

Nicholas's unassuming kiss inadvertently sets off what he sees to a wild, violent disjuncture in the object of his desire, an object that has now become two. But even though it literally appears to Nicholas that Bobby has "split," it is Nicholas who bears witness to the duality: it is his own desire, once contained and part of his singular nature, now made manifest, apart from himself yet still of himself. His education will be the care and nurturing of a thing that is uncultivated and undomesticated, corrupt yet oddly virginal.

As Nicholas harbours the ghoul, an influential and ghostly intelligence appears to him: his authoritarian military father, whose job is, apparently, to set him straight. The irony is that Nicholas, already delusional about his own identity and the ghoul he has somehow created, encounters *another* delusion which complements the first one. The father's random appearances serve to warn Nicholas to against same-sex pursuits, lest he himself turn into another misbegotten Bobby.

Nicholas begins to grasp the depth of his otherness in proportion to the ghoul's dissipation. That the corpse-like Bobby reveals *on the surface* the negative attributes of homosexual desire does not, nevertheless, prompt Nicholas to renounce his secret. He engages in duplicity and willingly bears the load he intuitively feels is his, since exposure would result in questions and possible censure. Lee Edelman argues that homosexuality is "constructed to bear the cultural burden of the rhetoricity inherent in 'sexuality'

morbid forms, is the uncanny, "something which ought to have remained hidden but has come to light" . With this in mind, Nicholas's proclivity might suggest transgressive forms of desire (including homosexuality) that have existed throughout history in various aspects, but that have, in the repressive decades of the early 20th century, reappeared as something represents the shadows of society itself. The desire comes to light, as it were, in the form of the ghoul. He is embodied as Nicholas's Bobby. Does Nicholas's inability to define his nature, personified by the ghoul, result in the ghoul's increasing disintegration?

For Nicholas, feelings are given. They are already there; they require expression. Yet since homosexuality is within the realm of prohibited representation, it can only be alluded to; it remains imprecise, in as much as Nicholas's self-definition is in flux.

itself; the consequence … is that a distinctive literariness or textuality, an allegorical representation, operates within the very concept of 'homosexuality'".[2] More simply put, Edelman argues that homosexuality, since it always stands in opposition to what it is not, comes to serve as a kind of shadow self to the body that supplies the shadow, that is, heterosexuality. Homosexuality is cast within a negative aesthetics, wherein all disturbing properties of sexuality, beyond that which is adult and missionary, find a place. Homosexuality often functions allegorically since it is often never the subject itself, though it does bear a relation to that to which it is subjected.

It is at the point of the kiss that such allegorizing begins. Erbach never signals a tonal shift away from a realistic world, beyond highly stylized uses of static, brilliant colour for prairie scenes, which are paradoxically claustrophobic and lack depth. Nicholas, confronting the healthy Bobby, tells him about the ghoulish doppelganger. Nicholas says, "He's so much like you. He is you…Isn't he?" Bobby seems nonplussed by the state of affairs, and tellingly refers to his subordinate (whom he does not see) as "it," never "he," as Nicholas does. Bobby wants Nicholas to return the ghoul, never explaining why, merely offering that "it's me, and it belongs to me." While the youths duel over *meaning*—ownership is strangely the issue for the two boys, when it should really be the fantastic nature of it all—Erbach's visual realism provides an abiding counterpoint, protecting against the possible drift into pointless ambiguity often associated with equivocating doubles.

The horror underscoring the nature of these gothic doubles finds a psychic explanation in, not unsurprisingly, Freud's notion of the much-discussed "uncanny," in his essay "The 'Uncanny'". Uncanny experiences, like Nicholas's, are frightening because they deny *precise* explanation; they threaten to compromise the otherwise firm boundaries between self and other. But duality, Freud says, is not in itself sufficient to help us understand "the extraordinarily strong feeling of something uncanny that pervades the conception. "[T]he quality of uncanniness can only come from the circumstances of the 'double' being a creation dating back to a very mental stage". Freud argues that the suppression of what was once familiar but is now forgotten might become transformed through repression. The result is a recurrent anxiety that, in its

Early in the film, Nicholas and Bobby debate who should come over to whose place. Nicholas says, "You could come to my place. But—my mom—you know. She gets in the way." Of course, adolescents are forever trying to escape the watch of their parents; yet what is denoted gathers significance in that Bobby doesn't see what Nicholas might mean, thereby shifting Nicholas's comment into another register. Bobby says, "In the way? In the way of what?" Nicholas can only offer, "Well, that's just how it seems," leaving any elucidation of "getting in the way" up to the viewer's imagination.

Similar to their adult-like struggle over meaning Nicholas and Bobby (pre-kiss) adopt at times a very mannered, mature disposition. Bobby, attracted to Jenna, invites himself and Nicholas to her upcoming party. In their negotiations, at once adolescent and adult, Jenna hesitates, then challenges: "Is there any reason you should come?" Bobby considers, then adroitly responds, "There is no reason why I shouldn't." Winning the argument depends on rhetorical skill rather that the kind of "I don't like you" one might find in adolescent repartee. What is highlighted is that the world children live in the simultaneously the world to which they aspire; Nicholas, however, tentatively refuses this world of heterosexual courtship and adult-like rhetoric.

At Jenna's party, the youths engage in spin-the-bottle, but when they score their respective matches, they do not publicly fulfill the contract. Rather, they go into a large closet to, presumably, kiss. Nicholas, who is at the party only at the behest of a pre-kissed Bobby, is forced to take part in the game. In the closet with a more knowing girl, Nicholas shies away from contact; but his partner obligingly messes up their appearances lest anyone think *she* is not desirable. The charades of youth are the games of adults; everyone thinks he or she knows what goes on, but no one will admit to the faÁade or to the idea that there is nothing beyond the surface—or that there is something *different* occurring beneath the surface. As Bobby later tells Nicholas, "It doesn't matter what happened. It's what they think happened."

Later, in caring for the ghoul while resisting Bobby's demands to turn "it" over, Nicholas wonders how long he must sustain the split by hiding the decaying embodiment rejected desire. Bobby-the-ghoul tells Nicholas, "I thought you cared about me." Nicholas

offers, "I'm trying." "*Try harder,*" the ghoul bites back. Nicholas then begins to have visions of his missing military father, who appears only to Nicholas, usually in bloody scenarios wherein he manipulates live subjects by inserting his hand, appended with scissors, into their back or undersides. The father is at once a manifestation of Nicholas's anxieties that he will be found out *and* a reflection of heterosexual, patriarchal edicts to follow the straight and narrow.

The most horrifying of all the father's interruptions comes in a manipulation of Nicholas's mother, a rather prim and already zombie-like woman, who repeatedly attempts to make Nicholas take the place of the absent father. She—or, rather, the father, with his hand in her back, mouthing the words in sync with hers—confronts Nicholas and his secret by saying, "There's a little space where your experience can go. I can show it to you." Nicholas promptly gets ill, which allows Bobby to steal the ghoul and, presumably, kill it; Nicholas sees him cheerfully dragging it away in a child's wagon. Bobby fully recovers, but since guilt must rest somewhere, Nicholas comes to own it. In his illness he observes that his healthy self hap-

pily eating in the kitchen with his mother; his reality is now that of the ghoul. Shortly thereafter, he is taken to a lonely house down the road, by his father, who, in this scene, finally speaks on his own accord and tells Nicholas that manifestations of his proscribed desires have no place to go but to this dead end.

Here, where Nicholas will subsist as the living dead, is place of ultimate horror, that of being isolated and abandoned. That his father is not necessarily alive does not matter; what he represents is nevertheless overweening and egregiously potent. Though homosexuality is never mentioned, the transgressive nature of what Nicholas is, and has done, is clear enough. Erbach's play with ghoulish representations metaphorically reflects the psychic violence of repression wrought by the potent prescriptions of heterosexuality's authoritative adults.

Notes
1 Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, New York: Arno, 1980, 11-12.
2 Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary Culture and Theory*, New York: Routledge, 1994, xvi.

From an interview with Jeff Erbach
October 2004

Jeff Erbach, the director of the Canadian feature *The Nature of Nicholas*, has recently curated a DVD for the Winnipeg Film Group, on a package of shorts from the 1990s. It comes with audio commentary with Erbach and each director, as well as an introductory write-up (by Erbach) on the WFG in the 1990s.

Andrew Lesk: You have created, with *The Nature of Nicholas*, very much what might be considered an art house film (regardless of whether or not certain festivals gave it just due); so then, has cinema—and especially the kind of cinema you are engaged in—become more and more a matter of self-promotion? And that those with the money can promote the best, in or outside of festivals? Then again, I might point, perhaps rather obviously, to your fellow Winnipegger, Guy Maddin. His work has often been from the margins, so to speak, but has reached a critical mass. Given that your work is every bit as interesting and proficient (and in some technical ways, similar) as his, has he succeeded because he is a more astute marketer?

Jeff Erbach: It's an interesting question, and I won't pretend to have all the answers, but do have a strong opinion on this. I don't think cinema has distilled itself down to simple self promotion, but do think that there are many quality films, and here I'm speaking of art house fair, that never get the distribution they deserve because the films, and those filmmakers, aren't given the opportunities. World cinema itself becomes distilled to twenty or thirty filmmakers, all who have screened at maybe one or two key festivals, and as a consequence secure massive international distribution.

Money is part of that equation, but it's also the stature of those involved and their influence, where a low budget film from Winnipeg, like mine, can easily be dismissed out of hand, especially at international events where, without having screened at some

large festival, others are unwilling to even watch it. This is a source of great frustration, not just for me, but many filmmakers. Guy, of course, destroys most of what I'm talking about, but only by making a body of work over many years.

His success, which I've stood for and will always defend to the death, is more a testament to his absolute stubbornness and obvious talent. He does help to illustrate the problem, and the frustration I mentioned earlier. How can you tell any filmmaker, like maybe the next Guy Maddin, that they should keep plugging away, living in poverty, working at some other job while making films every two or three years in the hopes that something might someday work out for them? This is why so many Canadian filmmakers simply melt back into society after one or two films, never to be heard from again, tired of working hard at getting funding, then making the darn thing, then trying to get it screened, then distributed properly, and so forth. For example, after making *The Nature of Nicholas*, I went back to my regular job, where I still am, as if I had never made the film at all. This hardly makes me feel like a filmmaker!

But I digress, and unlike some other filmmakers, only Guy could probably illuminate how his rise to stature took place, a journey which is dramatically different for everyone. However, though I appreciate your kind words, I don't see Guy's films as anything like my own. There is a definitive experimental vein in his work that is lacking in my own, a hybrid of Soviet Constructivism, early talkie, and German Expressionism all rolled into one revisionist piece. For all my abstract metaphor, my films are fairly straight forward, save for a deliberate pacing and staccato staging.

Lesk: Do institutions such as the Winnipeg Film Group have a role to play anymore in this era of "diminished returns"?
Erbach: Film collectives like the WFG are now, more than ever, absolutely vital to the long term sustainability of filmmaking as an art form. I don't think it would be a particularly good idea to leave the future of Canadian cinema in the hands of commercial producers, or the likes of the Canadian Film Centre. These small art collectives, where filmmakers can learn the craft in a nurturing,

supportive environment, free to explore their own personal stories, might not make anyone much money, but contribute to cinema and society in ways that transcend economic indicators. I've spoken with many European filmmakers who are nothing but jealous of the collectives in our country, a point that should be celebrated, and funded better!

I've actually worked at the WFG for a number of years, and in a number of different capacities. I've been the Vice President, the Production Coordinator, the Training Coordinator, and currently serve as a Training Consultant, helping them to set up their education programs.

Lesk: *The Nature of Nicholas* leans ever so forcefully on the metaphorical, almost to the point that the film seems to be an allegory on the vagaries of childhood sociability and desire, including the parental pull toward a normative sexuality. Where did these ideas, amongst others, find their genesis?

Erbach: Very tough question, because it almost cuts to the heart of the creative process. These are themes that have found homes in most of my films, though I couldn't begin to explain why without some self psychoanalysis.

I try to use film in the ways that I think film should be used—I suppose that's what every director does! I think filmmaking is a powerful creative tool that is rarely used as such. I'm not interested in straight forward storytelling, and often feel that many filmmakers are just photographing novels, using actors as talking pieces. Other filmmakers make very real, gritty drama, but don't need to commit the piece to cinema, as it just as easily could be a play. I think sound, pacing, rhythms, photography, writing, acting, and all should be linked magically to the content, so that the images and sounds resonate with the viewer, opening people up to new ideas and experiences not found in common day to day living. It's been said by people other than me, that I try to create waking dreams, hallucinatory films which drill straight past the frontal lobe and into the primitive areas of the mind.

I don't think there is enough artistic material devoted to how environment, history, memory, identity, family and sexuality are forever working in lock step. Sexuality has, only in recent human history, especially in Western culture, been narrowed to a very tightly packed set of ideas, with the parents acting as gate keepers to what should be a journey of personal discovery. There are now rigid definitions around acceptable desire, as social norms have become almost draconian in the way they guide individual behaviour and decision making. Kids have a way of breaking down the walls, and adults can learn a lot from their social interaction and candidness. I love using kids as small vessels for ideas, tiny human transports of where we are headed as a race, but also sentimental reminders of a fading, hazy time when we were gestating our adulthood. Tying sexuality, and not heterosexual, homosexual labeling, but that kind of murky, confusing mixture of both, to kids and their own developing identities, seems to come natural to me, and seems to be a horribly neglected part of North American understanding. We are, and continue to be, amazingly conservative regarding all things sexual, especially when it comes to teenagers and children, those who are least capable of grasping the emotional and psychological impacts it has on themselves and others.

However, after all this, I have to say that I'm not interested in spelling out some of these ideas in my filmmaking. Instead, I choose to squeeze these concepts through my big filter, my brain, and twist them into metaphors that are complicated, often forking into multiple meanings. Sometimes the experience is what counts, not the answers. That's probably the mantra that should be posted for anyone watching *The Nature of Nicholas*.

Lesk: But don't people try to relate the experience of any given film to a definable narrative, one which will give their experience grounding? I avoided thinking of *Nicholas* as gothic, since the label often comes too easily to any film that is not straightforward horror.

Erbach: You're right, of course, as the whole process of watching a film, or play, or looking at art, is about the subconscious struggle to make order out of chaos, deciphering the seemingly random order of events or scenes into something that makes personal sense. When I talk of open metaphors, the purpose is to allow for some flexibility and freedom in the process, so people bring their own perspectives and experiences to bear. In this manner, they are forced, if they choose to engage the film, to revisit their own ideas, and so become vulnerable to new ones.

Lesk: How does the experience with *Nicholas*, beyond its largesse, compare to your smaller, experimental efforts, such as *Under Chad Valley*? Do you hope to continue with features, or is there more work down the line in shorts and music videos?

Erbach: Making a feature film is altogether a completely different thing than making a short film. I admit to being a little surprised, and even maybe intimidated, by the sheer size, scope, and effort required.

I think *The Nature of Nicholas* was also a time when I felt I really found my filmmaking legs, the culmination of several years of honing my craft, and of pursuing certain important personal themes. We made the film in only 21 days, working with children who had never been in a film before, some of who had never even acted outside of school plays. Regardless of what anyone says, I know the weaknesses of the film, and the strengths, and learned more on that film than all of my short films combined. I tried to do something different, tried to make a film that took time to build its atmosphere and structures, instead of just hooking people with a large event in the first five minutes.

After making the film, I took a long, long time trying to decide what I should do. I tried getting some development money, but again, the avenues I was pursuing didn't seem particularly interested in what I was doing, and I found it nothing but frustrating. I returned to my roots, and am now finishing a ten minute film which will be out sometime this spring (of 2005). I used to make music videos, but find it massively unrewarding, almost like the only thing tying me, as a hopeful filmmaker, to a music video was that there happened to be a film camera on set. I only even recently put in an application to Telefilm Canada, and it's the first one I've submitted since my first feature, which was now many years ago. Unlike other filmmakers though, who seem to have applications in to Telefilm every year, I don't expect much will come of it, and can't see myself spending my whole life putting together applications and treatments for projects that will never see daylight.

I've basically arrived at a point in my life now where I'll just make some small films, and see what happens. Maybe they'll play some film festivals, maybe they won't. Maybe I won't even submit them to some festivals, part of what I've talked about earlier around promotion, opportunity, and needing to stay connected with key people. I've thought about never making another feature film, or maybe not making films altogether, but I'm too fond of cinema for that to happen.

The most exciting thing I thought of recently was moving to the country, and I think that speaks volumes.

Andrew Lesk recently completed his dissertation in Canadian Literature at the Université de Montréal. He now teaches at the University of Toronto. Check out his website http://www.andrewlesk.com.

The Local and the Global Revisited

UN 32 AOÛT SUR TERRE

BY DARRELL VARGA

In a smoke-filled Montréal café, the sound of an electronic pager causes the otherwise cool patrons to scramble in comic-ritualized sameness for the electronic leash until one identifies the alert as directed at him. This scene sets up the context of mediated communication between the main characters in this film and in turn reflects something of the remapping of spatial relationships facilitated through the global flows of capital, people, and culture. One defining characteristic of globalization is the privileging of selected urban centres as nodal points through which international networks of capital are organized—cities such as New York, Tokyo, London, Hong Kong are some of the specific sites where transnational exchange is directed, with secondary cities such as Toronto and Montréal striving to identify as players in this elite network, in part by promoting economic activity in such areas as finance, telecommunications, and cultural production over the traditional base of industrial manufacturing. The conse-

quences of this shift include an increased instability of employment as higher-wage unionized jobs are replaced by a more mobile service-sector and an increased class division between managerial professionals and workers.

This class division is, in turn, reflected in the spatial process of intensified development in selected areas (within the city and throughout the world) and systemic underdevelopment, or marginalization, in others. Of course, these class and spatial divisions are hardly new, Marx's *Capital* is, among other things, a primary text in the study of globalization in the form of international market expansion through the shift from feudalism to capitalism. Marx demonstrates how capitalist wealth creation requires continual change, yet ruling-class interests seek stability and that this is a key contradiction of capitalism for which ideology emerges as a force of stabilization. With respect to spatial production, stability is regulated through private property and this has become the

dominant system through which political economy is organized. Marx illuminates how this system precludes the fulfillment of real human needs. One function of ideological texts such as mainstream cinema is to naturalize relations of production and historically specific approaches to the production of space. Globalization is the intensification of this spatial practice identified by Marx, but it is shaped by a multitude of contradictions in the coherence of local and global needs—contradictions articulated in specific cultural texts such as *Un 32 Août Sur Terre* and more generally in considerations of national cinema.

Mike Featherstone points out that in addition to elite finance, legal, and management professionals the category of "design professional" is also located in these key urban centres of globalization. Together, the habitus and interrelation of market-directed activity with cultural production contributes significantly to the production of dominant ideology and it is articulated through cultural texts as much as through political action. As Featherstone indicates:

> **It is the integration of the particular services located in particular quarters of these world cities which produces transnational sets of social relations, practices, and cultures. The process of globalization is therefore uneven, and if one aspect of it is the consciousness of the world as a single place, then it is in these select quarters of world cities that we find people working in environments which rely upon advanced means of communications which overcome time-space separation.[1]**

But what of those Montréal cafés? Featherstone's argument is set against the simple binary distinction between a global homogenous culture dominated by American media and local particularity that is more rooted, unique and "genuine." Instead, local cultural practices may emerge and be understood as unique precisely in response to the intensity of global flows of exchange. Featherstone goes on to suggest that "globalization produces postmodernism," an aesthetic approach privileging localism and difference rather than continuity and unity, attributes of modernism. If the local and the global are understood not as discrete paradigms but as overlapping sites of meaning so too must we understand postmodernism not as a clear break from modernism as per Lyotard but as a set of practices in dialectical relation with modernist aesthetics as with history. The question remains whether a postmodern practice is locked into a simplified view of history as warehouse of images free of materialist referent or whether critical consciousness facilitates coherence and a means of articulating the overlap of creative and ideological impulses.

These questions of overlap and emergent meaning are certainly important with respect to cinema as the dominant art form bridging the eras of modernism and postmodernism, and as a form
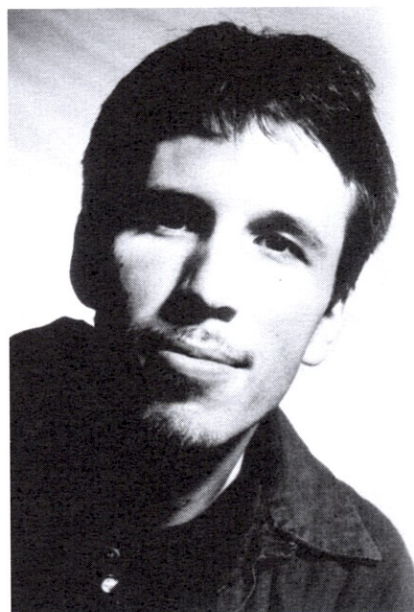
Denis Villeneuve

that has invited substantial experimentation while also, in its mainstream narrative manifestations having remained well-rooted in 19th century literary conventions. Indeed, cinema and related media entertainment products are a primary object of circulation in the global economy. Those Montréal cafés signify, within Quebec cinema and for the tourism and finance industries, an aura of worldliness as well as an authentic link with history—an argument predicated upon a shared (if simplistic) understanding of mass culture as otherwise characterized by depthlessness. Cinema itself functions in Canada as a means of articulating cultural legitimacy and distinction in the face of anxieties over cultural homogenization. The film industry in Quebec is especially interesting in this regard as it services a mass audience within the province while being recognized in English Canada as contributing significantly to the art cinema credentials of Canadian national cinema.

In Denis Villeneuve's 1998 feature *Un 32 Août Sur Terre (August 32 on Earth)* border-crossing and temporal and spatial displacement in relation to the flows of the global media economy are explicit themes as are references to an earlier generation of art-house cinema, that produced in Quebec in the 1960s and more famously by the French New Wave. These earlier movements are interesting for the ways that they functioned as expressions of national culture which in turn circulated internationally and significantly influenced production practices within the mainstream Hollywood film industry. They articulate a desire to be free from tradition-bound concepts of time and space. We see this for instance in formal cinematic practices as well as the embrace of a subjective and verité-influenced style in resistance to the weight of

studio-bound conventions. This characterization does not fit all films from this era, but it does evoke something of the felt experience of youth culture and the response to these films. My argument about *August 32 on Earth* is that it uses the New Wave era as a kind of meditation point—evoking its formal and narrative elements as source of energy and inspiration while also providing an entry point to the examination of issues of expression and identity in the present. This film screened at the Cannes film festival, an important meeting point for cinema as art and as industry. Cannes is a key marketing venue, but it also provides films with cultural legitimacy as works of art. That the film did not find commercial distribution in English Canada or in the U.S. may point to the waning of effect in these new wave referents.

The complexity of cinema emerges in part from its rootedness in the particularity of time and space and its function as a technology that crosses these vectors. In the opening images of *August 32 on Earth* it is night and we see a flickering car headlight—evoking the intense beam of a carbon-arc film projector igniting and signaling the spectator's entrance to the dream space of cinema. We see that the film's main character, Simone, who looks strikingly like French New Wave star Jean Seberg, is falling asleep at the wheel. The next day, she awakens, buckled into her overturned car amidst a tangle of tall grasses along the side of the road. So begins the expansion of time as a title card reads "32 août." Simone manages to bust out of the overturned car and a passing motorist takes her to a hospital. A doctor explains to Simone that she may experience some short term memory loss—here the particular circumstances of the accident bring to mind larger questions of loss, displacement, and historical amnesia attendant to the postmodern condition.

After the car accident and visit to the hospital, Simone makes several phone calls which suggest her professional location in the global communications and media apparatus, even as it remains unclear where she is specifically calling from. We see that the rural background landscape has been urbanized in a generic technological sameness, the flow of traffic, the highway and telephone network itself, and adjacent hydro-electric structure could be almost anywhere in the western world, especially given the absence of wide establishing shots or long takes which would invite attention to localizing detail. In fact, an aesthetic strategy of close shots and soft-focus backgrounds is precisely the strategy used by mainstream films to negate the specificity of locations in order to carry out productions where it is economically convenient rather than in accordance with identified setting in the script. Simone rests by the side of the road and a close shot frames her hand literally clutching at the ground until she hitches a ride to the generic comfort of an anonymous roadside motel. While these spaces are undistinguished in their particular locality, they are recognizable as familiar cinematic sites. We later discern that she is on a highway outside of Montréal but this highway, the hospital, and a roadside motel look like any given non-place of North American public space. Indeed, Simone is supposed to have traveled to Italy on assignment as a model and when she makes a telephone call, which precedes the comic scene in the café, she says she is in Italy and as evidence holds the phone toward the noise of traffic and construction sounds—a recurring reference to the spatial homogeneity of contemporary experience facilitated by the veiling mediation of technological communications. The medium helps produce a homogenizing sameness while also transmitting a signifier of the old world as location of culture and authenticity: "Not Italy is offered, but evidence that it exists," as Adorno and Horkheimer proclaim in their account of the administrative force of mass culture.[2]
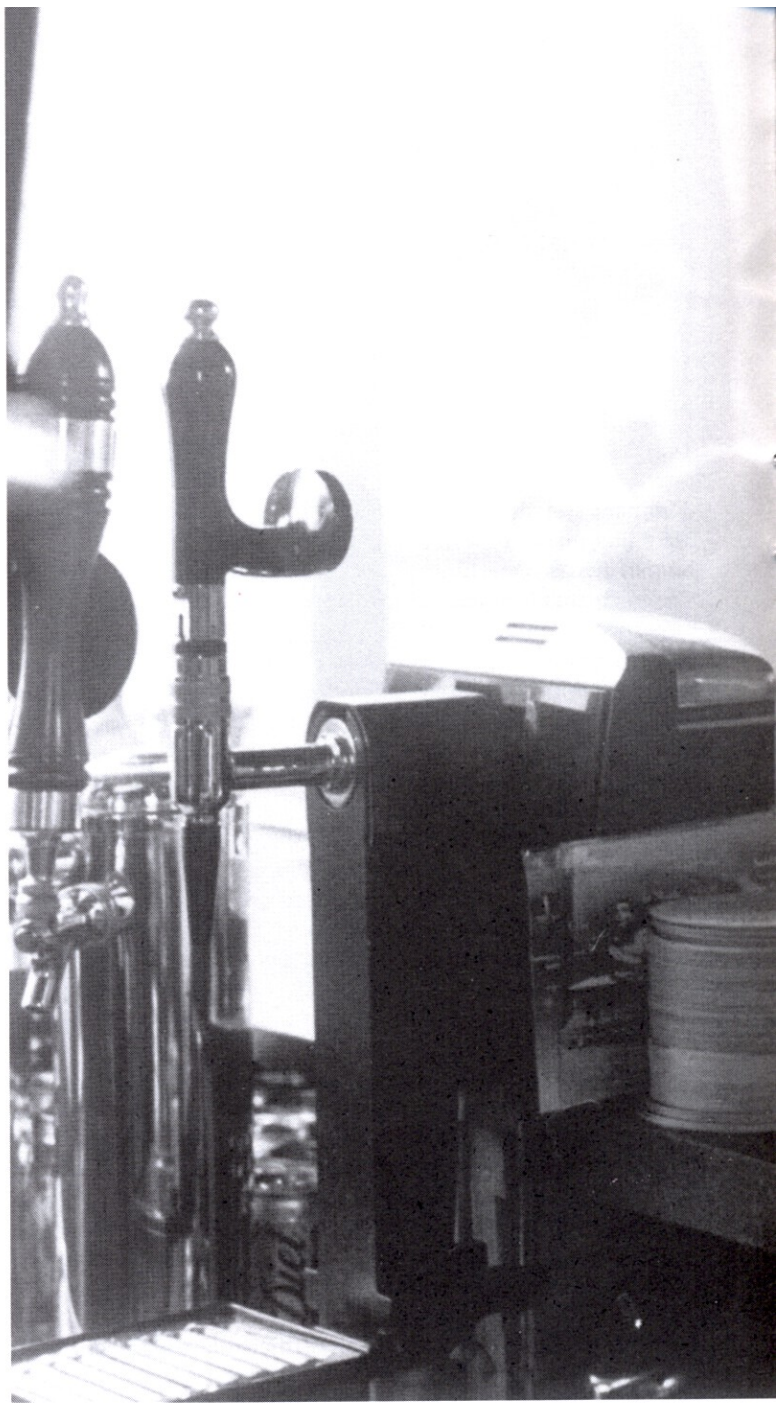
The notion of authenticity on the one hand is attached to a nostalgic concept of tradition but we see that it is a free-floating signifier disconnected from the specificity of culture and locale. In *August 32 On Earth* Simone is already free from the space-bound constraints of tradition. She is a successful fashion model fully integrated into the global system of media exchange who declares a kind of return to locality in her unexpected desire to become pregnant and raise a child following the near-disaster experience of the automobile accident—technologized mobility is frozen and a dialectic of generative desire begins. The film does not posit an anti-feminist backlash through a return to traditional roles; instead, what emerges is an interesting engagement with contemporary spatial production and an expressed desire to locate the self other than as object in the transnational flow of commodities. Simone selects her close friend Philippe to function as sperm donor, and he poses the condition that they have intercourse in the desert. The film then produces these characters in relation to the complexities of spatial formation. Throughout the film, char-

acter identity does not emerge as an extension of place but as a constellation of mass-mediated images from which models of self, of gender, and of social praxis are formed. In her recent analysis of contemporary Canadian films as contradictory articulations of capitalist globalization, Brenda Longfellow points out, following such thinkers as Arjun Appadurai and Saskia Sassen, how globalization is not simply a macro-economic phenomenon; rather, it manifests in the concrete contradictions of everyday life in the local sphere.[3] Longfellow convincingly argues how Canadian films, as a consequence of the financing and distribution infrastructure, manifest the contradictions of the local and the global.

Films are, on the one hand, concrete representations of place and these representations are understood in the context of prevailing assumptions of Canadian culture and stereotypical relations to landscape. On the other hand, contemporary film is integrated into a global media marketplace where ephemeral images have become dominant commodities of exchange, and where images of a given space are abstracted from the lived reality of place. The

study of national cinema has typically been undertaken with the premise of a correspondence between representation and the shared experience of the place of the nation but in the case of Canadian national cinema images exist either as marginal art house form or as commodity object of the global media culture, but rarely as expression of the shared popular culture experience of most Canadians.[4] What meaning thus emerges from these images of place and how do contemporary films articulate the contradictions and overlap of meanings in manifestations of space and place? From the perspective of critical analysis, what do these contradictions have to say about our shared cultural expressions of lived reality in the era of globalization?

Key to Appadurai's argument is that binary distinctions between home and away or local and global cannot account for the complexity of culture and the lived experiences of people any more than can the strategic economic actions of transnational corporations. His point is that mobility takes multiple forms, including migration, but also through economic and political channels,

media, technology, and in the form of cultural texts. This border traffic flows in multiple directions, some of it is state-sanctioned and some of it exists at the fringes of official culture, some of it involves crossing under cover of night. Longfellow's argument is made primarily through an analysis of Denis Villeneuve's second feature film, *Maelström* (2000) which similarly involves border-crossing on the part of an elite "design professional" who must sort through contradictions of identity and desire following a traffic accident where she runs over an aging Norwegian fish plant worker who stumbles home, only to die alone at his kitchen table.

It needs to be said that the freedom and means to investigate questions of identity through the performance of border crossing is largely the privilege of a professional elite. Globalization is, however, the political unconscious of these films rather than the manifest theme; they are as much about the desire and subjectivity of the main characters. Where *August 32 on Earth* involves the desire to procreate, *Maelström* begins with an abortion. What Longfellow points out of the latter is likewise true of the former, in both films the characters resist the systematic technocratic rationalization of space and culture through a romanticized return to nature, a "recourse to this romantic fantasy of non-coded, non-territorialized spaces of nature."[5] In both films, a desire for meaning is undertaken from the position of existentialist subjectivity and against a backdrop of social life characterized by random accident and violence rather than through an engagement with the historical forces giving shape to that social reality. But where *Maelström* posits a kind of destiny in the love between the main characters, *August 32 on Earth* situates true love as randomly interrupted by violence. In both cases, the characters are as much in love with an image of love and destiny as they are with each other.

Maelström does begin through an encounter with class, but that becomes the social-economic fact that dare not speak it's name in the text. While on the one hand it is correct, as Longfellow asserts, to follow Appadurai's model of cultural complexity and take into account the multiplicity of border crossings as opposed to the more singular economic determinism which posits globalization as the strict consequence of the shifting locations of transnational capital. On the other hand, one has to keep in mind the overwhelming influence of American-based military-industrial interests in the shaping of global traffic. As Masao Miyoshi points out, in describing the formation of the U.S. military-industrial complex during the cold war, how military interests were deployed to regulate and prop up production. This economic strategy of state interventionism is of course massively elided in a dominant ideological narrative of a free market. Miyoshi points out:

> **The Pentagon, in short, is the U.S. equivalent of Japan's Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI); it plans and executes a centrally organized economic policy. Thus it is more accurate to say that national security questions were essentially economic in nature. The U.S. economy, rather than merely reacting to uncontrollable foreign threats, actually guided world relations.**[6]

Miyoshi then draws a connection between popular protests against corporations involved in production related to the war in Vietnam and the decision on the part of those leading corporate entities to shift production overseas. In any case, these economic relations continue to serve as the base informing cultural activity and exchange, which is not to assume an essentialist determinism. Cinematic characters articulating either world-weariness or a sense of global flux, to suggest two positions dominant in contemporary art-inflected indie cinema, are nonetheless produced by prevailing

economic and political circumstances. Simone's boy-toy Philippe practices an urban existentialist despair modeled on stock male protagonists from New Wave art cinema. When we first see him in that Montréal café he refers to a newspaper story about deaths in Algeria, recalling for us the Algerian War of Independence against French colonial rule which is the background political context of the French New Wave—a national art cinema culture that becomes globally hegemonic at the very time that the nation-state's colonial legitimacy disintegrates. Philippe is a medical student integrated, however reluctantly, into the upwardly mobile and technologized hierarchy of professionalism. While he claims the intention to drop out, the litany of past professions he has studied but has not pursued to completion suggests an access to capital and the leisure of choice which is the domain of the professional class via the self-referential and self-effacing romantic guise of student.

For these characters, identity and gender are formed across the spaces of city life and a globalized mass-mediated experience. In a distorted reference to a Canadian New Wave cinema in the nascent form of *À tout prendre* (Claude Jutra, 1963) where the revelation is provided for Claude, as lead performer and implicitly as directorial autobiography, that he desires boys, Philippe expresses his hetero-angst over Simone's proposal: "I can't. For me, you're not a girl, you're like a guy. I mean, you're my best friend, not a girl." Later we learn that he is hopelessly in love with Simone, iconographically suggested by the retro New Wave poster of an androgynous Jean Seberg prominently displayed on his apartment wall and with whom, as already mentioned, Simone marks an uncanny resemblance. As he struggles with the decision whether or not to have sex with Simone, his girlfriend Juliette calls to him while in the bathtub but instead Philippe crawls into his male roommate's bed to ask for his advice. The stereotype of male fear of commitment (even though Simone explicitly says that she does not want a long term relationship, she just wants sperm from a familiar and agreeable source) collides with violent homophobia at the film's end when Philippe, still debating whether to come to/in Simone's bed, is beaten by a group of thugs outside of Montreal's Victoria Square Metro. Philippe is assumed to be gay, is maliciously and brutally beaten, and ends up in a coma from which recovery is unlikely. The physical violence collides with his hetero anxiety of sexual misidentification, situating identity as produced by the violence of power in the control over space and emerging in the specificity of location. The violence of the city comes not from being within the mass but from the spatial emptiness of late-night downtown office towers.

Likewise the Montréal of *Maelström*, as Longfellow points out, is represented not by café culture but by the cold instrumentality of the business district, "a graphic embodiment of the specularity of late capitalism."[7] The Victoria Square metro station is adjacent to the Montreal Stock Exchange, and while there is a nearby gay strip club, it is not known as a cruising area or generally understood as a gay space, the formation of which requires the protective veil of population density.[8] The spatial concept of gay space takes for granted the violent homophobia informing the organization of territory. Here the possibility of community is displaced precisely through economic and spatial instrumentalization; the city is truly terrifying when it is empty. But it is connection and community that Philippe is fearful of and his implied (and repressed) sexual fluidity is displaced onto an over-romanticized movie-image he has of Simone as his ideal unrequited love. The film is framed by violence, the first technological (Simone's car crash) and the second socially produced (Philippe's queer bashing), in both cases emerging from a spatial displacement of community in the abstracting processes of globalized image-making.

absolutely flat (like the Canadian prairies). The choice of this particular destination is not through the direct experience of a particular geographic formation, but by arbitrary convenience—Simone studies an atlas and sees that the space of Africa is too far to accommodate the temporal cycle of her ovulation. In fact, the history of the Salt Flats is entirely bound up with the production of American militarized imperialism, for it is here that NASA and the military launch imperialist vessels, the automobile industry test its travel inventions, and where celebrated cultural activities such as land travel

When Simone and Philippe finally arrive in the desert of their desire, the encounter is informed by unease, disappointment, and disconnection. They travel to the hot sun of Utah but decide that it is not an appropriate space for sex and begin a return to civilization—in the guise of nearby Salt Lake City, where Jell-O™ is the official snack as recognized by the state legislature. As a local chef declares: "Jell-O is as much a part of Utah as the Great Salt Lake, our world famous powder skiing and our scenic national parks."[9] Spatial organization is closely related to food production but in spite of this romanticized attachment to landscape in the chef's comments, this food simulacrum points to a disconnection between locations of production and of consumption, not to mention the collapse of meaning as related to depth and history in modernist concepts of place. The Jell-O iconization is a consequence of lobbying efforts undertaken by the Christian fundamentalist Brigham Young University student-run public relations firm with help from celebrity benign media patriarch Bill Cosby. It is worth mentioning here for its conflation of community formation, the interpellative function of institutional religion, celebrity, transnational food production, and media marketing. These trajectories of power converge at a rubbery centre: the banal consumption of sugared fat rendered from otherwise unmarketable dead animal parts—providing a metonymic taste of the instrumentalization of nature in the mass-mediated social production of space.

This space of the desert is overdetermined by hyper-masculine tropes of individualism untrammeled by the constraints of civilization. Of course, for urban citizens such as Philippe and Simone, this romantic notion is formed through the experience of media culture and, in fact, arrival at the literal desert is a disappointment. The discomfort and disappointment depicted at the salt flats can be read as a parody of warm weather southern vacation destinations heavily promoted within Canada, the privatized pleasure of the transnational travel and exchange apparatus in its hierarchical north-south vector—what the Sex Pistols call a holiday in other people's misery. The Utah salt flats do not provide the cinematic depth perspective of contour and shading. As ancient sea bed, It is a rock hard surface that is white like freshly-fallen snow and

speed records are set. The popular celebration of the latter serves to naturalize the spatial and power relations embedded in the former. Moreover, the relative ease with which Simone and Philippe arrive at this location stems from first world economic privilege and a lack of the traditional institutional constraints upon mobility in the form of family and work obligations or the deterrent of immigration restrictions. This privilege is exploited in the film for the purpose of individual fulfillment entirely disconnected from the consequences of its exercise within the context of the spatial production of uneven development, save for Philippe's vague liberal guilt. As much as the production of space in which Philippe and Simone participates suggests a cultural homogenization, it is a process predicated upon the vast inequality of access to wealth and the power to traverse space.

The trip to the desert should be read with Doreen Massey's account of the distinctions between different experiences of time-space compression. Massey proposes an imaginary viewing position from above the earth's orbiting satellites, aided, as all spectatorship is, by a particular manifestation of technology:

Furthest out are the satellites, then aeroplanes, the long hall between London and Tokyo and the hop from San Salvador to Guatemala City. Some of this is people moving, some of it is physical trade, some is media broadcasting. There are faxes, e-mail, film-distribution networks, financial flows and transactions. Look in closer and there are ships and trains, steam trains slogging laboriously up hills somewhere in Asia. Look in closer still and there somewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, there's a woman—amongst many women—on foot, who still spends hours a day collecting water.[10]

What a particular subject position constructs as empty space to be conquered or passed over is, for another, a place of life and struggle. The Utah desert is an important example of the instrumentalist tendency to produce certain kinds of space as empty, because it serves no immediate use-value to the market economy and because the existing habitat does not accord to prevailing assump-

tions of nature as measured by an obvious and easily visible abundance of flora and fauna. The Canadian equivalents include justifications for the resource exploitation of the Arctic and low-level military flying over traditional Innu territory in Labrador.[11] These spaces become acceptable as sites for environmental damage and the displacement of traditional peoples because in the instrumentalist imagination of imperialist technocracy, there is "nothing" to damage. In the case of Utah, the fallout from nuclear testing was made acceptable by a marketing campaign by the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission celebrating the spectacle of explosions. The governor of the neighbouring state of Nevada declared the use value of this desert space, measured, it seems, by the military's ability to destroy it: "No matter who's right, it's exciting to think that the submarginal land of the proving ground is furthering science and helping national defense. We had long ago written off that terrain as wasteland and today it's blooming with atoms."[12]

All of this is to say that the Utah desert is a strange place to want to have sex. Moreover, Salt Lake City is the site of the Family History Library operated by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, an institution as concerned with the strict regulation of sexuality for the purpose of reproduction as it is with genealogical research and record keeping. This library is the largest of its kind in the world (with extensive holdings of family records from around the world, including, for instance, English church records and African oral histories) and is a significant tourist attraction to this city even if it is not fertile ground for these rootless sex tourists. If getting to the desert is relatively easy, getting out proves to be much more difficult. A cab driver introduced reading a dog-eared pulp paperback about extraterrestrials agrees to drive them to the desert for a fee of one hundred dollars and later demands an additional four hundred dollars for the return trip to the city. He is the Canadian media stereotype of the greedy and violent American, interested in space as site of exploitation rather than the more generative intentions of the visitors. Yet these visitors are unable to see the desert space itself except as insufficient manifestation of that which has been culturally romanticized. They have to walk, but urban flânerie does not resolve the desperation for mobility and it is impossible to hail another cab as much as, in this penultimate instance, the characters desire interpellation. They are unable to reproduce and they are outside of the Althusserian apparatus for the production of social relations. The whiteness of the ground serves, like the snow of the Canadian North, as blank slate for cultural projection. Simone's blood drips onto the hard surface, a wound borne from the struggle with the taxi driver and recalling the violence beneath the surface of globalization as well as signifying her own menstrual cycle and the thwarting of her desire for conception. That they are victims of economic exploitation is clear enough in their particular experience but that condition is viscerally connected with systemic power inequities when the two come upon a corpse in the desert. The body is badly scorched with only blackened bones remaining, a fuel canister is discarded nearby, and the arms are bound with handcuffs. Whether this figure is the victim of a random violent crime, racial lynching or police brutality remains unexplained, but the brutalized body serves as a reminder that the conditions of the so-called third world (a space produced as a consequence of a specific organization of production and exchange) are always a lot closer to home than most western citizens care to imagine.

When the two finally arrive in the city, they take accommodation in the "Space Hotel" an overpriced tourist trap model of Asian overnight capsule-style hotel rooms. Here the western concept of luxury and comfort is inverted in the transnational referent of the advertisement: "Experience Japanese style comfort." This womb-like interior enclosure, howevermuch a product of commerce and technology (what is first thought to be a window is identified as a television—the window writ large), recalls the sleeping spaces visualized in science fiction movies and serves as safe space away from the violent uses to which the vast desert is put. Yet neither are able to sleep and when Simone steps out, Philippe mimes the weightlessness of space travel, a bodily gesture learned from the experience of mass media images where extraordinary achievements of spatial production are routinized as ordinary.[13] Simone returns to the safe space of their rented capsule with a bottle of Mescal and the bodily disorientation of weightlessness is matched by intoxication; the characters engage in playful and spontaneous interaction not witnessed in the film's open landscape spaces. Simone swallows the Mescal worm, an ironic dystopian reference to her desire for insemination, and Philippe jokingly describes the extreme intoxicating effects. Simone and Philippe are products of this cultural matrix whereby identity is produced through the tourist experience of media culture and in turn are unable to find a space of pleasure in their everyday environment. On the other hand, they are finally drunk and happy even if they have not made another baby for an already overloaded planet. A temporary sense of locality is created in the non-place of the Space Hotel and insofar as the meaning of place is socially produced it is no less authentic than that of the Montréal café. The meanings of space and place, and of the local and global, are not simply fixed in binary relation but are produced in a contingent relation of ideology, lived experience, and cultural coding. They too will dissolve into air. Later, when Philippe is in a coma, Simone visits him in the hospital and the film ends with her whisper into his ear that she will make love to him, followed by a fast tracking shot over the salt flats. The collapse of meaning via random violence is met by a romanticized return to nature but it is a return that signifies itself as already at a remove from the dialectical production of the local and the global, a revision of authenticity as image.

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NOTES
1. Mike Featherstone, "Localism, Globalism, and Cultural Identity," in Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake, eds. *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 61.
2. Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* trans. John Cumming (New York: Continuum, 1972), p. 148.
3. Brenda Longfellow, "Counter-Narratives, Class Politics and Metropolitan Dystopias: Representations of Globalization in *Maelström, waydowntown* and *La Moitié gauche du frigo*," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 13:1 (Spring 2004): 69-83.
4. I refer to the shared experience of theatre going but this is by no means the dominant way to see Canadian films. See Charles Acland, *Screen Traffic: Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 183 and passim.
5. Longfellow, p. 71.
6. Masao Miyoshi, "A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State," in *Global/Local*, p. 84.
7. Longfellow, p. 72.
8. I thank Tom Waugh for this map.
9. See: *http://commworld.byu.edu/jello.html*.
10. Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 148.
11. For articulations of resistance from a first nations perspective, see the films *Amarok's Song: Journey to Nunavut* (Ole Gjerstad and Martin Kreelak, 1998) and *Hunters and Bombers* (Nigel Markham and Hugh Brody, 1990).
12. Cited in Catherine Caufield, *Multiple Exposures: Chronicles of the Radiation Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. 105.
13. For a useful analysis of the proletarianization of professionals in outer space, see John McCullough, "The Exile of Professionals: John Glenn, Planet of the Apes and 2001: A Space Odyssey," *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 10:2 (Fall 2001): 37-58.

YOU WATCH
TOO MUCH TV, KID

CASUALTIES OF
CULTURAL COLONIALISM

BY ROBERT L. CAGLE

At the time of its release in 1993, David Wellington's *I Love A Man In Uniform* was hailed by Canadian critics as one of the most provocative features to emerge from Canada's then still *new* "new wave." Critic Geoff Pevere observed, "Wellington's message is as blunt and direct (but not nearly so simple) as a nightstick. As such, it's the first Canadian movie to have fashioned a literal parable out of the consequences of living with a borrowed pop mythology."[1]

Other critics echoed Pevere's views, praising the film's brilliantly self-reflexive analysis of Canadian masculinity in the shadow of the American other.[2] However, after this initial flurry of critical acclaim, the film seems to have dropped out of discussions of Canada's national cinemas. This essay is written in the hope that it will reawaken interest in this important cinematic work.

Wellington's film makes compelling use of the trope of masquerade to illustrate and comment on the profound effects of globalization (a polite term for American cultural colonization) on Canada's and Canadians' senses of self. By day, Henry Adler (Tom McCamus) is a mild-mannered bank clerk in a busy Toronto financial institution; by night he is a part-time actor playing a cop named Flanagan on a cheesy American "reality" show being shot in Toronto. Neither of these identities is "natural"—both require Henry to conform to the expectations of those around him; both demand, at least on some level, a certain amount of play-acting.

This theme of masquerade extends to the overall film, as well: the city in which the narrative takes place is obviously (especially for Canadians and those familiar with the city) Toronto, but it is never named,

I Love a Man in Uniform

a move that points toward the common practice by which various Canadian cities—especially Toronto and Vancouver—are passed off as American cities in US-based productions shot north of the border, as is the case with the television program on which Henry stars. Likewise, the film conforms to a prescribed set of representational conventions (with a healthy dose of irony) established by Hollywood productions. (Some reviewers mistakenly wrote off the film as being nothing more than a pale imitation of Scorsese's 1976 *Taxi Driver*—a misinterpretation that misses the point of the film entirely.) This both allows the film to reach an audience in an industry defined and driven by Hollywood standards and products, and at the same time, gives it the opportunity to act out, formally, thematically, and narratively speaking, the very same type of impersonation that appears in its storyline. In other words, the film assumes the trappings of an American action film, at least on the surface, to comment on the overwhelming influence of American action films on international markets and consumers.

Wellington's film focuses on and embodies the related practices of imposture and masquerade, phenomena that arise in the face of disparity between desire and access, between fantasy and reality. The film clearly associates this need for impersonation—this imperative to "pass" as something one isn't—with the colonization of Canada's industries of self representation, both economically and ideologically, by Hollywood. By focusing on a character, a *Canadian*, whose life is profoundly affected by the discrepancies between his everyday life and the ideals he is presented by the media, the film illustrates the undue power American images exert on Canadian popular culture, and by extension, on Canadian identity. At the same time, because its own form is a borrowed one, heavily indebted to American crime dramas, the motion picture itself enacts a kind of masquerade, reflexively levelling a critique that extends far beyond the boundaries of this specific issue, and illustrating the limitations imposed, however indirectly, on Canada's industries of self-representation by the Hollywood machine. The film underscores the continuity that exists between the its storyline, the its form, and its protagonist; it illustrates how both film and character, quite literally, are the products (both in the sense of "commodity" and in the sense of "result") of a specific representational system, and at the same time, of a reaction to alienation and estrangement from that very system.

This project extends even to the film's advertising material. The central image of the poster, a close-up of actor McCamus as Henry Adler, is a distorted one. The left side of the photo bears all of the visual signifiers associated with Henry the bank clerk: the fragility of his frameless glasses and his calm smile reflect Henry's frailty and subservience. The upper right-hand quadrant of the close-up is obscured by the partial double exposure of Henry-as-Flanagan, the ostensibly "good" American cop that he plays in the television series *Crime Wave*. The visual signifiers associated with this invading image, though, suggest that Flanagan is anything but "good": the dark sunglasses, policeman's hat and badge, and leather jacket read as somehow menacing in their striking incongruity. This second image, the fragment of Flanagan's face, is photographed from an angle entirely different from that of Adler's: whereas Adler is shot from nearly straight on, Flanagan is photographed from above and slightly to the right. This disparity underscores in clear visual terms the ill fit of this second identity. Notable too is the fact that the lapel of the leather jacket extends beyond the lower edge of the photo, lending this secondary image an even more ominous feel by destroying the integrity of the representational frame. Across the bottom of the image is written, "i love a man in UNIFORM." The letter "I" in the word "UNIFORM" is replaced by a small black and white

image of Henry-as-Flanagan walking his beat with his night stick.

The overshadowing of Henry's face—the corporeal signifier of his identity—by that of the character he plays, signified by the superimposition of certain articles of clothing, illustrates how, as one reviewer puts it, "clothes make the man—into a psychotic."[3] The strange form of the title, too, raises certain issues about subjectivity: For example, the "i" that opens the sentence should be capitalized, since it is clearly used here as a nominative first-person personal pronoun. Instead, it is written as a lower-case letter, devaluing its nominative function and placing it, along with the other words in lower case letters, in a subordinate position to the word "UNIFORM," written in all upper-case letters and a noticeably larger typeface. Likewise, the "I" in "UNIFORM," the only "I" that is capitalized in the title, and the one that could, thus, arguably be aligned with the first person subject position, is written over by an "it," an image of the idealized character that Henry, the "I" of the film, objectifies and literally becomes. Thus, even though the image of the policeman, the fantasmatic ideal for Henry, replaces the letter "I," it is, in turn, (re)obscured by the letter in the reading process, as the "I" of subjectivity—the place from which the subject, Henry, may speak—can only come into being where the image—the image of an American other—once was: Where it (i.e., the image) was/is, there the "I" should be.

This process also comes into play in the bank robbery scene that functions as a pivotal point in the film's narrative. The sequence opens with Henry seated at his desk, underlining lines of dialogue in his copy of the television script. The scene on which he is working is a characteristically violent and heroic one, with his television alter-ego, Flanagan, referring to some perpetrator as a "dirtbag" (a favorite insult) and slamming him against a wall. Henry's boss (Graham McPherson), whose dislike of this second career has already been established, walks past his desk and comments, sarcastically, "Pace yourself, Henry." He insinuates that Henry's actions conceal some kind of criminal behaviour—an accusation that the spectator recognizes, uncomfortably, is completely unfounded.

Suddenly a voice explodes in the cavernous space of the bank: "Nobody in or out!" The image track cuts from Henry to the site of the action, as an armed robber (Steve Ambrose) enters the bank, followed closely by a woman (Dana Brooks) dressed as Marilyn Monroe in *The Seven Year Itch* (Billy Wilder, USA 1955). "Marilyn" brandishes a large, silver-toned revolver with practiced nonchalance, as she grabs a security guard standing near the door and announces in a chillingly calm voice, "Everyone get down on the fucking floor!" She then turns to the security guard and breathily commands, "Hands up, sunshine!" As the guard complies she places the gun to his temple and fires, her face frozen in a startlingly emotionless Hollywood smile.

"Okay now, which one of you little piggies is the vault teller?" she asks, sashaying toward the desks behind which Henry and his coworkers kneel. As his eyes meet hers, he attempts to avert his gaze, looking quickly toward the ground. "Is it you, big boy?" she asks, approaching him. Without responding, he continues to stare at the floor until she commands him to get up. As he starts to stand, she stops him short, holding the gun at crotch level and placing the barrel into his mouth. She moves the gun around suggestively in a bizarre simulation of fellatio. "The next time I ask you to do something, you'll be quick, okay?"

Henry is then shown watching the female robber as she unloads the contents of the vault into her shoulder bag. She attempts to make small talk, remarking, "My father was named Henry. We used to call him Hank. Do people call you Hank?"

"No." he responds, emotionless.

The robber then saunters out of the bank, pausing only to remark, "Thank you, Henry" and to pose over an air vent. Her white dress billows up in the breeze in a perverse simulation of the iconic image of Marilyn Monroe standing on the grating of a New York City subway. Like her Hollywood role model, this Marilyn giggles seductively.

The female bank robber's performance plays a significant part in the film's self-referential critique of the media, in that it sums up the film's themes of collapsing binarisms (reality and representation, American-ness and Canadian-ness, masculine and feminine), media-based colonization, and identity disorder. In depicting the figure of the robber as a seductive icon of both femininity and the Hollywood system, the film exposes the fact that Hollywood's control affects not only Canada's economic existence, but also its unconscious as well. The (Canadian) woman who robs

the bank remains unrecognized, but her (American) alter-ego, Marilyn Monroe, is instantly recognizable to any and all as an icon of femininity.

The simulated Marilyn brings Henry to his knees in a decidedly sexualized act of violence: She places her pistol into his mouth—an action that has repercussions throughout the rest of the film—situating her in what can only be termed a "masculinized" (i.e., possessing a symbolic phallus) position, and thus problematizing Henry's own claim to masculinity. At the same time, however, her demeanor is unquestionably feminine. Her clothing and her appearance conform to standards of Hollywood erotica. As she breezes out of the bank with all of the money, effectively appropriating the economic power that it represents, she shrugs a brief "Thank you Henry" and leaves her audience with a fleeting and nearly spotless (the blood from the murdered security guard is

barely visible on her shoulder) image of idealized femininity in exchange. Her appropriation of phallic authority is complete, as is the symbolic castration of her "audience."

This masking of aggressivity—a trait culturally associated with masculinity—with hyper-femininity bears a striking resemblance to a phenomenon outlined by psychoanalyst Joan Riviere in her 1929 article, "Womanliness as Masquerade". [4] Riviere describes the unusual compulsion of a female patient, who, after presenting intellectual and political material to an audience of males, feels the need to engage in exaggerated flirtation and coquetry as a means of warding off the anxiety that she will become the object of their scorn for daring to assume a masculine privilege. Riviere goes on to state that:

> [i]n everyday life one may observe the mask of femininity taking curious forms. One capable housewife of my acquaintance is a woman of great ability, and can herself attend to typically masculine matters. But when…any builder or upholsterer is called in she has a compulsion to hide all her technical knowledge from him and show deference to the workman, making her suggestions in an innocent and artless manner, as if they were lucky guesses….[E]ven with the butcher and baker, whom she rules in reality with a rod of iron, she cannot openly take up a firm straightforward stand; she feels herself as it were 'acting a part,' she puts on the semblance of a rather uneducated, foolish, and bewildered woman, yet in the end, always making her point. (38)

Riviere's theory of masquerade seems a particularly fitting tool for analyzing the above-described sequence, even though the robber does not merely exaggerate her own "femininity" through flirtation and coquetry, but rather, masks her identity, however incompletely, by assuming the role of an icon of femininity—of Hollywood sex symbol, Marilyn Monroe. In fact, the female robber merely does the same thing that Henry—who is equally "castrated," culturally speaking—does every day: she finds a way to redefine her identity to obtain access to power, and protecting herself from attack by putting up a false front of femininity, of castration. Her polite demeanor and her feminine behaviour manage to deflect, at least in part, the negativity that would normally be associated with such criminal activity: She may be a criminal, but she's not a bad person. She holds up the bank, but she does it politely.

The sequence furthermore insistently illustrates the hegemonic force Hollywood imagery exerts on the Canadian imagination. A simple bank robbery becomes a complex nexus of cultural exchanges—an example of the extent to which reality is mediated and structured by representation. It also sets up the terms for the film's eventual deconstruction of the very terms of that representation. The "real" identity of the robber (who is never seen again) becomes a secondary concern, overshadowed as it is by her performance, which refers back to a pop culture icon. Unlike the conventional bank robber of popular fantasy, who disguises his face with a ski mask or a pair of pantyhose, this robber's act of imposture does not merely obscure her "real" identity, but rather, carefully rearticulates it through an/other identity, through mediated imagery. The act of aggression, of robbery, becomes almost secondary to her playful disguise in the trappings of American pop culture, with both acts serving as a kind of theft or appropriation.

The investigation sequence that immediately follows the bank robbery mimics the visual patterns of the hold up in reverse, only this time it is Henry, not Marilyn, who is at the focus of the gaze. As the sequence begins, the body of the murdered security guard is carried out of the bank, through the very same doors through which the robbers originally entered. Henry is once again behind his desk, however, this time he is seated and is being interrogated by a detective (Michael Hogan)—an older man whose brusque demeanor is decidedly different from the robber's polite tone, and whose name, Detective Itch, hearkens back to an ad lib added by Henry during his audition for the role of Flanagan on *Crime Wave*: "Filth like you makes my trigger finger itch." It is interesting to note that immediately following the audition—the moment at which Henry's darker side is first revealed—he reverts back to his mild-mannered self, graciously acknowledging the director (Daniel MacIvor) as he explains that his indignity, his anger, has been channeled from his experience of seeing a policeman murdered on the previous day. Thus, his appropriation of phallic power is, by necessity, a fleeting one, and followed by a return to exaggerated subservience—Henry remains steadfastly the loyal subject of the order that he so doggedly admires and idealizes.

While on the surface the investigation scene suggests that order is in the process of being restored (individuals are now in their "right" places, the representatives of law and order have arrived) certain details of the scene suggest otherwise: as Itch, seated opposite Henry, continues his interrogation, he begins to insinuate that Henry has played some part in the robbery (thus singling him out, just as Marilyn did in her search for the "piggie in charge of the vault"). Upon becoming the focus of attention, Henry once again diverts his gaze. This time, however, instead of glancing at the floor, he looks toward his left. What he sees is a teller, a young woman dressed in a business suit, kneeling in front of one of the investigating officers, a large, African-American man, and guiding his index finger into her mouth, evidently as a means of illustrating her testimony of what has happened earlier. Visibly taken aback by this display, or perhaps more important, by the sexual overtones of what it represents and/or the trauma it reawakens, Henry once again focuses his attention on the officer seated across from him.

"I've never stolen anything in my life." he responds in carefully measured tones, almost as though reading lines of dialogue, to the policeman's insinuation. "There's right and there's wrong. I know the difference."

"Oh you do?" the cop asks, smiling.

Itch then stands and exits, his displeasure at the lack of information he has been able to obtain from Henry is apparent in his behavior. In parting, the officer uses the same line as the robber, transforming the phrase from its original ironic sense into a sarcastic accusation—a comment to which Henry is again, as before, unable to reply: "Thank you Henry!" The parting words serve as both an attack upon Henry's character (serving the same accusatory, insulting function as Henry's earlier "filth" ad lib) and a painful reminder of his victimization. The investigating officer's behavior makes him the object of scorn that normally might have been directed at the criminal. His accusations and his rudeness alienate him from Henry, and from the audience, thus beginning what will eventually become the film's larger project of unmasking those individuals that Henry considers to be "good," revealing their evil sides in the process.

At this point, the investigation scene comes to an abrupt end, and there is a cut to the on-location shoot of *Crime Wave*, the television program in which Henry has been cast as a police officer. The cut represents a kind of circular movement back to the beginning of the robbery sequence (Henry highlighting his dialogue) and links Henry's blank expression at the cop's accusation with a similarly blank look on his face at the shoot. At the same time, it reverses the roles in the power structure once again, this time placing Henry in the empowered (albeit illusorily) position. An elec-

tronic slate with clap sticks slides into the shot, establishing, by virtue of its presence, that the sequence that is to follow is, in fact, taking place on a film or television set, and undercutting the authority symbolized by Henry's attire. In other words, it underscores the fact that he is not a police officer, but rather, plays one on television.

The continuity between Henry's expressions suggests that the cop's accusation—and indeed, possibly all of the mental and emotional trauma brought about by the day's experiences—is still very much on Henry's mind. His rather energetic (excessive, even) performance as a "good cop"—the kind who knows the difference between right and wrong—becomes a kind of symptomatic reaction to the earlier attacks on his person, his masculinity, and his character at the bank. At the same time, Henry's performance reinforces his image not only of a "good person"—and it should be pointed out that nothing in the narrative up to this point has suggested otherwise—but more so, as an individual wrongly accused of criminal activity. This is supported by Henry's reversion back to his kindly self after each of his violent outbursts. Of course, given that it is through Henry that all of the film's events are mediated—that Henry serves as the primary site for spectatorial identification—the cathexis that Henry achieves through his performance on the set coincides with a similar spectatorial desire for cathexis and resolution—a desire created by the narrative and disseminated through established, classical modes of representation, spectatorship, and ultimately identification.

In a 1958 article entitled "On Screen Defenses,

Screen Hunger, and Screen Identity,"[5] psychoanalyst Ralph Greenson (coincidentally, the analyst of American icon Marilyn Monroe, whose image is at the center of this film) details the development of psychoanalysis, from its early focus on symptom neuroses, through the character disorder-phase of the post-World War I era, and finally ending up with what he terms the identity disorder of the post-World War II period. These identity disorders, according to Greenson, were "a product of American culture." "In an uncertain world one searches for salvation in a variety of ways." writes Greenson. "Among them, in a country like America where we have so many choices and so many pressures, we search often for a new identity instead of a fuller and richer identity." (261)

This concern with the assumption of identity remains a central focus throughout Wellington's film. As Henry becomes increasingly insecure with his own identity as a less-than masculine man, and disillusioned by the indignities he must suffer as a result of this problematized gender position, he decides to change identities—to become an impostor. He discovers how easily he can pass as a police officer quite by accident when one day he simply walks out of his apartment and onto the street wearing his costume. While on the street, he meets a police squad car headed in the opposite direction. Henry freezes in his tracks, evidently not knowing what to do and fearing arrest for impersonating an officer. Instead, the officer in the car simply flashes his lights at Henry and waves. The transformation, then, is complete.

It is important to note here that this process—the practice of imposture—while superficially resembling that of masquerade, does not incorporate a reparative or defensive function in its practice, but rather merely amounts to the assumption of an other's identity (and always the identity of someone who possesses more power, more cultural capital that the impostor himself) in order to gain access to material or symbolic power. Henry's identity disorder, then, fluctuates between imposture (when he ruthlessly assumes the role of cop on the street) and masquerade (those instances in which his manner reverts back to humble compliance, as it does in the audition scene). The significance of this difference for the film is that the overall project of *I Love A Man In Uniform* is clearly aligned with that of masquerade, in that the film itself does not purport to be an American (or even a transnational) feature, as did many of the low-budget tax shelter films produced in Canada in the 1980s, but rather merely assumes the superficial qualities of a certain type of American motion picture as a means of gaining power to articulate its critique.

Henry continues to develop this other side of his personality, buying a walkie-talkie radio and responding to the calls he picks up on it. He walks a regular beat at night, checking out the neighborhood and even taking part in a bust when yet another policeman mistakes him for the real thing. "You wanna give me a hand with this dirtbag?" the cop yells when he sees Henry passing the alleyway in which he is fighting with a particularly defiant young man. Henry jumps right in, slugging the assailant and pinning him against the wall. "Now we'll win," the cop says, matter of factly. Henry turns toward the cop who has called for help and recites the lines from his television program that have signalled his entry into the fantasy world of cops and robbers: "You want me to cuff his ass?" he barks. "You want me to read him his rights?" The other policeman laughs, incredulous at Henry's suggestion. "You watch too much TV, kid." he says.

Henry relaxes, comfortable that his imposture is successful, until the other cop notices that *he is not carrying a gun* (props are not supplied with the costume). Henry attempts to cover the empty holster, the sign of his own cultural castration, with his hat,

but not quickly enough. "What kind of cop are you?" asks the patrol officer (the suggestion being, "What kind of *man* are you?"). "Where's your gun?" Henry responds that he has left it in his car. As the cuffed assailant attempts to escape, the policeman turns and fires his gun into the air as a warning, thus establishing his irrefutable phallic authority. As he turns back toward Henry, gun smoke still hanging in the air, he discovers that Henry has disappeared. A whirl of fog rises and spins in the space where he last stood, its presence an ironic reminder of the idiomatic phrase that might well describe the disappearing act of Henry's fleeting masculine privilege: "up in smoke."

The crisis of masculinity that attracts and holds the film's attention is, in fact, a common theme and concern in a number of Canadian films. Several critics have made explicit reference to the supposed failure of Canadian masculinity in the face of American super-heroism. Robert Fothergill refers to such crises as "the younger brother syndrome" in his "Coward, Bully, or Clown: The Dream Life of a Younger Brother".[6] Wellington's film makes this crisis explicit by giving Henry no real masculine figures with whom to identify, other than the fantasmatically "good" (and equally false) images of cops that he so idealizes. Henry's father (David Hemblen), for example, is a bitter, broken man, who lives alone in a small suburban bungalow. His life revolves almost exclusively around playing the lottery and watching television. He dies around halfway into the narrative after suffering a debilitating stroke. Henry's boss at work is a sarcastic and uncaring man, whose demand that Henry choose a banking career instead of following his creative dreams smacks more of a concern for his own economic interest than any concern for Henry's well being. Thus, Henry finds himself thoroughly surrounded by a cast of imperfect or even emasculated "fathers," whose inability to live up to Henry's cinematic expectations leads him to look elsewhere for icons and inspiration. Not surprisingly, Henry turns to the imaginary world of American television, the world in which he first discovered his ideal in the first place, and then to the real life cops of Toronto's streets. But even after Henry adopts the appearance and demeanor of the policemen whom he so idealizes, he discovers that in order to obtain the respect that he so craves, he must increasingly resort to violence, and even to criminal behaviour—the very behaviour that has driven him to imposture in the first place.

Henry attempts to take his prop gun with him from the set, but is caught by a crew member who removes it from his holster (another symbolic castration). Later, as he returns home from one of his many afternoon patrols, he comes across a teenager (Matthew Ferguson) attempting to break into an apartment in his building. Quietly he sneaks up behind the boy and places the end of his nightstick against the teen's back, *simulating* the feel of a gun barrel. The teen responds by putting his hands in the air and surrendering his own firearm, a gun that he has *stolen* from his *father's night stand* (the sexual overtones are obvious). Henry now has his gun, his "proof" that he embodies the patriarchal, masculine ideal that he has so sought to attain.

The film's ironic depiction of the cycles that result from the appropriation and reappropriation of masculine power and privilege (most clearly signified by firearms) illustrates in undeniable terms how the very same power and privilege that maintain social order can be redirected (ever so slightly) to criminal ends. In this film a thin, nearly non-existent line marks the border between law-and-order and lawlessness.

For example, the film utilizes the metaphor of rape, of characters forced to perform fellatio (whether symbolic or literal) to illustrate Henry's move from law-abiding citizen to criminal. In the hold-up sequence, Henry is orally penetrated by the female rob-

ber's gun. This act is at once both sexualized and yet non-sexual; the power structures at work in the sequence are manifestly apparent, especially given the presence of the gun. The next sequence to incorporate the theme of oral sex is the repetition of Henry's victimization by another (female) bank employee while she illustrates for the police investigators what has taken place during the robbery. This second act reads as both more ironic and more sexual, in that no gun is involved, with the fingers of the male police officer taking its place. Finally, near the film's end, Henry wanders the streets of Toronto and stumbles across a police squad car parked in an alley. In the car a man in uniform is being fellated by a woman whom he has obviously coerced into performing the act. Henry is shocked and titillated by this vision. He stares, nearly uncomprehendingly, into the car as the policeman's partner (Kevin Tighe) approaches and asks Henry for his assistance with a raid. Henry agrees to take part. Finally, after the raid, in which Henry is tricked into murdering a young Asian drug dealer (Von Flores) who is clearly involved in some type of under-the-table double-dealing with the police. His vision of order now completely destroyed, Henry escapes into a side street lined with prostitutes. He grabs one who resembles, at least superficially, his co-star Charlie (Brigitte Bako), the woman who has become the object of his obsessive affections, and forces her to perform oral sex on him. He leans against a wall and stares into the air, acknowledging the woman only by occasionally slapping her and shouting at her, "Don't fucking touch me."

Henry's disillusionment has now come full circle. He has come to realize that the role models in whom he has invested such respect are, in fact, nothing more than representations, projections of his own naïve notions of correct behavior. The "good" policemen that Henry believed in do not exist. In their place he discovers human beings driven by greed and lust—desperate men who are as weak as he is, if not more so.

In the film's final sequence Henry returns to his father's home (the final hallowed site of patriarchal authority) and turns on the television. There on the screen is the final episode of *Crime Wave*, in which his character, Flanagan, and his arch enemy gun one another down. Henry sits in his father's chair holding his appropriated revolver in one hand and spinning the chamber with the other as he stares at his mirror image reflected back at him from the television screen. As Henry-as-Flanagan negotiates the release of a hostage, Henry-as-viewer stares blankly at the screen, his reflection superimposed over the action. He silently mouths the words of his character's death scene as he inserts the gun into his own mouth, once again penetrated by the deadly symbol of masculine power. As Flanagan is shot down in the street (a heroic death for a heroic character), Henry fires the gun, killing himself and spraying the living room with gore. The immense window behind him shatters as Henry falls forward, lifeless.

Henry has been sucked into the vortex of a violent and alien culture that he has been duped into trusting and idealizing. As both an agent of this culture and as an outsider (because of his uniquely double identity as Canadian citizen and American character), Henry finds nowhere else to turn his gun but on himself, escaping the endless chain of signifiers and simulations that he finally recognizes as false. Henry's final act is to kill off the most artificial signifier of "good" that he knows: himself. In a sense, his suicide becomes a final reversion back to subservience after playing at being a heroic male. Thus, he becomes a casualty of the cultural colonialism that seduces and eventually destroys him.

The film closes with a kind of ironic epilogue: It is the morning after Henry's suicide and a police car drives past Henry's father's house. The patrolman notices that the front window of the house is shattered and radios the police station. He believes that a robbery has taken place. As he approaches the house, the image track cuts to a medium shot of the living room where Henry sits, slumped dead in his father's chair as birds fly frantically around the room. The police officer peers into the room and then reacts: "We've got a man down here! Quick!" The film withholds the final punch line of the scene, opting not to show Henry's posthumous unmasking, and thus posing the same type of enigma for the investigating officer that the crime at the film's opening (the senseless murder of a police officer on a busy Toronto street) has for the viewer.

I Love A Man In Uniform illustrates the deadly consequences of adopting incongruous and foreign models of identity and behavior by/for Canada. It presents Henry's extreme identity disorder and the violence attendant with it as less the result of Henry's occupation of a specifically American subject position (as though violence were somehow inherently not Canadian), that the outcome of Henry's being shown (by the television drama on which he plays a role) that his lifestyle, his notion of masculinity, is somehow flawed, somehow less-than ideal. Henry's violent side, then, is, at its base, as "Canadian" as his other identity is. Its articulation, however, is effected through a set of specifically American codes—i.e., through Henry's transformation of himself into an American character from an American drama. His suicide, his ultimate destruction, represents a final punishment, meted out by Henry himself against himself for daring to overstep the sacred boundaries that separate him from those he idealizes. In the final analysis, *I Love A Man In Uniform* is not an attack on the United States, or even on American masculinity, *per se*. It is, rather, a thoughtful and provocative analysis of the means in which individuals play a part (literally, in Henry's case) in their own colonization.

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NOTES
1. Geoff Pevere, "Pop Culture Poison: David Wellington's *I Love A Man In Uniform* (*Take One*.3, Fall 1993), 17.
2. See, for example Brian D. Johnson, "Law and Disorder: The Clothes Make The Man—Into A Psychotic" (*Maclean's*, 22 Nov 1993), 74; Craig MacInnis, "Rookie's dark, brilliant debut digs into the Canadian psyche" (*Toronto Star*, 12 Nov 1993) B1; and Katherine Monk, "Unstable actor takes a walk on the wild side" (*Vancouver Sun*, 17 Dec 1993), C7, later reprinted in *Weird Sex & Snowshoes and Other Canadian Film Phenomena* (Vancouver: Raincoast, 2001), 301. It goes oddly unmentioned in virtually all of the recent studies on the subject, and although the film is mentioned in Wise's encyclopedic *Take One's Essential Guide to Canadian Cinema*, Wellington is not given his own entry. See George Melnyk, *One Hundred Years of Canadian Cinema* (Toronto: UTP, 2004); Christopher E. Gittings, *Canadian National Cinema: Ideology, Difference, and Representation* (London: Routledge, 2002); and William Beard and Jerry White, *North of Everything: English-Canadian Cinema Since 1980* (Edmonton: U Alberta P, 2003).
3. Johnson, 74. The image, thus, echoes Freud's famous statement (in his *Introductory Lectures*) "Wo Es war soll Ich werden" (112) which later became the theoretical cornerstone for Jacques Lacan's essay "The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious" (1960). Lacan interprets the sentence as ,"There, where it was just now, there where it was for a while, between an extinction that is still glowing and a birth that is retarded, 'I' can come into being and disappear from what I say." Thus, it is the IT (the object, the other) that allows for the articulation of an I. See Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (1933 [1932]) trans. James Strachey (London: Pelican, 1973) 112; and Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection* trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) 298-299.
4. Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as Masquerade" (1929) in *Formations of Fantasy* ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986)
5. Ralph Greenson, "On Screen Defenses, Screen Hunger, and Screen Identity" (*Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 6.2, 1958), 242-262.
6. Robert Fothergill, "Coward, Bully, or Clown: The Dream Life of a Younger Brother" in *The Canadian Film Reader* ed., Seth Feldman and Joyce Nelson (Toronto: UTP, 1977), 234-250.
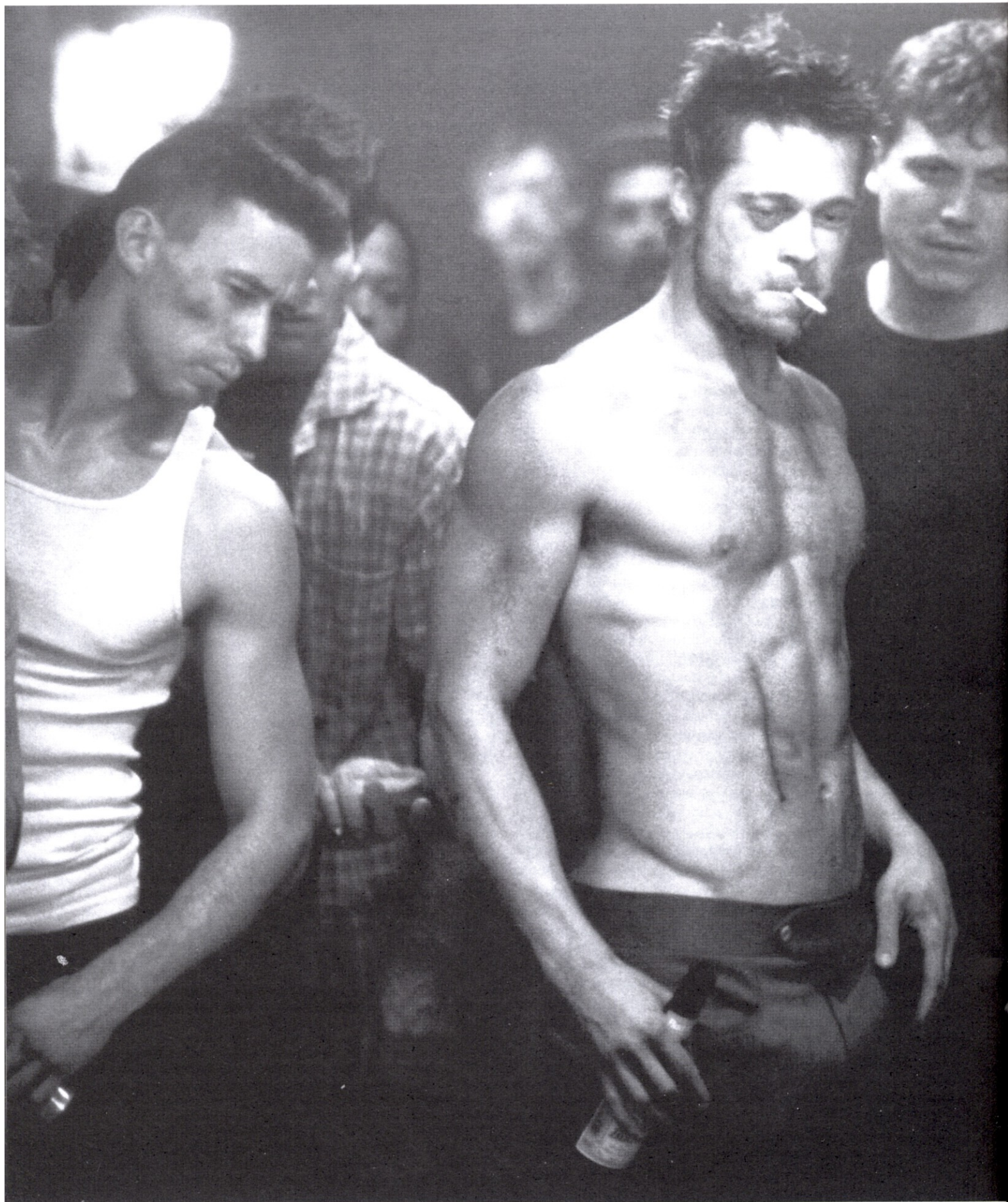
TEDIUM AND TORTURE

FIGHT CLUB, GLOBALIZATION AND PROFESSIONALS IN CRISIS

BY JOHN McCULLOUGH

PART 1: *Fight Club* and Social Meaning

In this essay I discuss David Fincher's *Fight Club* (US, 1999) as a provocative anti-capitalist cultural artifact, one which articulates a widely-resonant and resistant "structure of feeling".[1] This is significant because, in the midst of the celebratory discourse of globalization, and the daily operation of transnational capital, including speculative investment, out-sourcing, downsizing, "restructuring," and the militarized expropriation of labour and natural resources, it is necessary to remind ourselves that most people in the world are not immune to the degradation of life in capital, and are attracted to dystopic stories about the end of capitalism. In many cases, it could be said that the people of the world share sentiments with those heroic (and sometimes mad) social agents (like the central characters of action films, including *Fight Club*) who would bring the system to its knees. In Hollywood, populism and popular nihilism rule the day, as cultural producers and audiences anticipate the latest spectacle that can be "blowed up real good," as the *SCTV* film reviewers used to exclaim.

Fight Club, despite its art cinema "look," is one of many films, made throughout the last decade of the 20th century, which connect with their audiences by telling stories about a failed American Dream. With its various depictions of male characters who discuss, deride and destroy elements and signs of daily consumption (e.g., Martha Stewart, Ikea, Starbucks, BMW), the film is easily recognized as anti-consumerist, but its anti-capitalism has been less commented upon, and its other meanings (in particular, its sexism) have been understood in a variety of ways. For instance, fans have taken the film's depiction of the "fight club" as an endorsement of masculine violence, with the most zealous acolytes reportedly setting up their own "fight clubs," in the wake of the film's

Fight Club

release. Cultural critics have also misunderstood the film's meanings and Henry Giroux, in particular, was moved on several occasions, to dismiss the film as an opportunistic gloss on anti-consumerism, and a clarion call for macho pranksters of the world to unite.[2] Yet, other critics considered it an inspired critique of masculinity.[3] The confusion in determining the value of the film is symptomatic, I think, of the indeterminacy, in general, of the period of globalization. That the cultural work of the period would be incoherent, multivalent, incomplete, and tentative seems entirely consistent with what we know about this historical conjuncture. In general, though, we can understand these types of dramas to be about professionals in a crisis-riddled capitalism.

Often, the crisis which threatens contemporary professionals has class-based origins but, in the world which these films construct, class relations are difficult to articulate, principally because the class designation of professionals, while easy to represent, is difficult to fully comprehend. That is, professionals seem to occupy a place of privilege in capitalism, and this is often represented as middle class indifference to class struggle, although professionals are regularly minions to it, or victims of it (sometimes both). Moreover, while they populate the upper echelon of capitalism's hierarchies and the state's bureaucracies, professionals also recognize that their knowledge is being instrumentalized, and this engenders a degree of disharmony in relations between owners and professionals. But, typically, professionals are understood to be "organization people" and "team players" who, like Smithers in *The Simpsons*, conform to established power relations in society.

Fight Club is a story about the delusions of professionals in the "New World Order". It is an extraordinary representation of the repressed rage of middle America, which has intensified since the loss of the Vietnam war. This social anxiety has been fuelled by a variety of social movements, including feminism and the civil rights movement, but is also involves confusion about post-Fordism and post-Keynesian economics, as well as frustration over the collapse of the American Dream. Usually male and white, this anger and disillusion is expressed as "populist resentment," and includes such cultural artifacts and phenomena as the FOX television network, Michael Moore, *Roseanne*, John Carpenter's *They Live!*, the yuppie horror film, professional wrestling, reality television programming, tv talk shows, "shock jocks" like Rush Limbaugh, Howard Stern, and G. Gordon Liddy, male rampage films, *C.O.P.S.*, and nihilist slacker entertainment. The anger and distrust expressed in such culture is directed at economic disparity, lack of effective leadership, various forms of alienation and oppression, broken homes, the increased role of consumption and shopping (i.e., the so-called "feminization" of America), the loss of communities and social networks, ecological devastation, and a general sense of dystopia and collapse, on both personal and social levels.

While anti-establishment critique is emblematic of much Hollywood film of the last 25 years, what makes *Fight Club* progressive is that it portrays violent masculinist resistance to capitalism as both attractive *and* misguided. On the one hand, this explains the film's success with large numbers of young white males, but it also explains why their partial reading, or entire misreading of the film, led to re-enactments of the "fight clubs." The film does not advocate such a solution and, in fact, makes it clear that the paramilitary reaction (both in the film and in real life) is a masculine fantasy, and a dystopic, mysogynist endgame. In short, the "fight club" is psychotic behaviour. Nonetheless, the film's criticism of consumerism is an often humourous and effective critical strategy, which connects good ol' American libertarianism to class struggle. The subversive lifestyle, pranks and actions (e.g., golfing in de-industrialized urban zones, recycling fat as soap and explosives,

manipulating workplace rules for personal gain, vandalism) align freedom with urban resistance. The film makes clear that the "clubs" are typically organized around an affinity structure that is white and white collar working class. This has serious and obvious limitations, but the film's success with "its" audience is suggestive of the severity of disenfranchisement felt by this group of workers in globalization. Ed Norton's character, for instance, is profoundly confused about his identity, and the film draws attention to this by providing alter-egos, as well as not providing a fixed name for his character, who is variously known as Rupert, Jack, Cornelius, and, in the end credits, simply as the narrator. One of the alter-egos, Tyler Durden (played by Brad Pitt), makes the point that Ed Norton's identity crisis, his "multiple personality disorder," is a result of the larger social crisis that surrounds, and gives historical signification to, his personal story. For example, "Martha Stewart" is presented as the pre-eminent ideal of bourgeois order, but Tyler says that she is only *apparently* an ideal of control, because "she is polishing the brass on *The Titanic*" which, he gleefully exclaims, is "all going down". In 1999, when the film was released, but especially now, with Martha in jail, this dialogue rings true. The reference to Stewart is not an innocent aside, nor is it shaped solely by the protagonist's idiosyncratic personality, and it is not a cheap or obvious joke about bourgeois lifestyles. It can be read as a slogan, a manifesto, and, at the very least, as a critical comment on the state of contemporary class relations.

From this perspective, the film should be seen as a "totality," a fictional representation of a whole contemporary world, which has the appearance of crisis, but the essence of the system called capitalism. Each one of the elements, then, becomes a fractal unit of a critique of capitalism. For instance, Ed Norton, sitting *a la* Rodin's "The Thinker" (1880), on his toilet, ordering by phone from the Ikea catalogue, speaks volumes about the constipating effects of capitalist relations. I am tempted to call this a "dialectical image," in the sense that it represents an essential moment in class struggle: that moment that unites making crap, buying crap, and having a crap. And, because the composition of the shot recalls this particular sculpture, the filmmaker encourages us to reflect on the ways that our conscious lives, our "thinking," has been colonized by the crap we produce and consume. *Fight Club* is about these kinds of ideas.

PART 2: Movies and Professionals in Crisis

Today's movies offer no utopia, since everything
you'd ever want, they say, is here for sale.
—Mark Crispin Miller[4]

Crises are thus reasoned out of existence here by forgetting or
denying the first elements of capitalist production: ... the relation
of money or commodities to wage-labour.
—Karl Marx[5]

As Mark Crispin Miller points out, the movies have become a showcase, a display window, for the accumulated products of capitalism, to which the middle class is routinely represented as having privileged access. But this privilege comes at a high cost, and it is the crisis that Marx describes that inspires my overview of movies about the middle class. Typically, we can understand the middle class to occupy a variety of identities, jobs, and pay scales, but for the purpose of this essay, I assume a profound correspondence between professional, white collar labour and middle class identity. Moreover, the middle class lifestyle which is foreground-

Fight Club

Fight Club
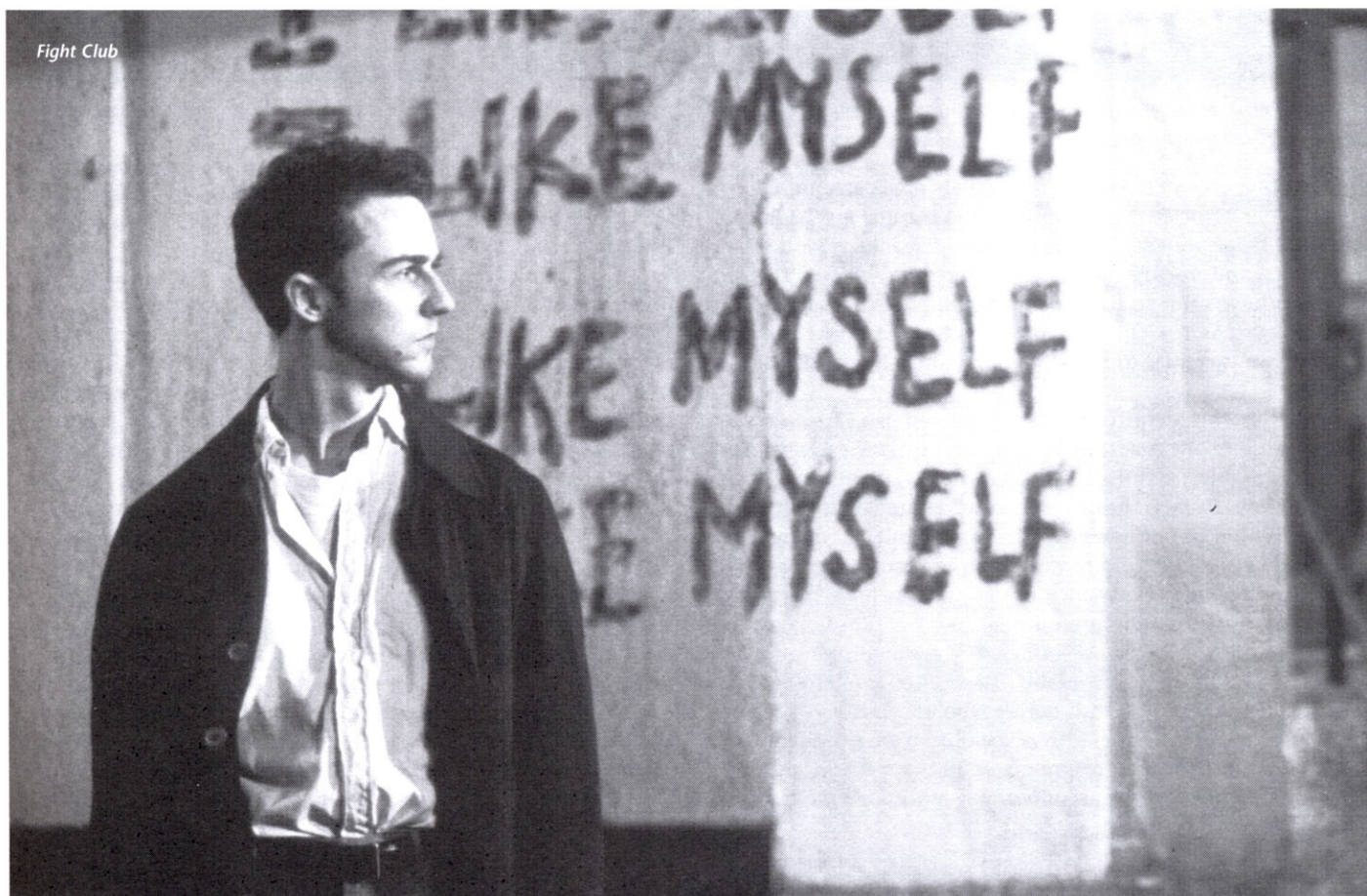
ed in popular US entertainment is routinely predicated on the consumer habits associated with professional income levels. But professionals range widely in terms of their identities as workers and consumers, and my argument is that the crises which afflict professionals have a lot to do with their ambivalent relationship to class struggle. As Erik Olin Wright and others have discussed, this ambivalence is central to the identity crisis of the middle class, in general.[6]

In movies, this identity crisis is represented in a variety of ways, and in a variety of extraordinary crises and spectacles. Here, clerks blow up buildings; architects fall from the sky; doctors get ill; and "players" lose. In fact, the crises themselves are commodities that help to "reason out of existence," as Marx explains, the real contradictions experienced by professionals in contemporary capitalism, including their experience of daily life as both tedium and torture. For instance, the professional in crisis film tells us quite clearly that torture (often self-inflicted) is a rite of passage for the American middle class. Invariably, these films are structured as extreme crisis narratives, with heroes who are given extraordinary tasks, which they execute with a maximum of stress and pain. These heroes are tortured before our eyes! But we realize that torture is always preceded by an unbearable landslide of tedium, and

that, as the central character is torn between tedium and torture, real ideological contradictions (associated with globalization) are being worked-out on the screen.

The tedium of professional life is typically evident in the opening scenes of these films, during the story's expository stage, or Act One. In many cases, this tedium coexists with the representations of privilege that have become synonymous with middle class life in the movies. Professionals' houses, cars and leisure time activities are depicted as excessive and opulent, but this excess is also normalized because it is never the topic of conversation. For example, as we meet Michael Douglas' character in *Disclosure* (US, 1994, Barry Levinson), shuffling about, in a rush to get mundane tasks completed, with children and spouse running interference, we cannot avoid the abundance (of property) that co-exists with the tedium of preparing for another day (of torture) at the office. As well, the films often attempt to portray the various degrees of professional status as indexed by the objects which each professional owns. For instance, Ed Norton's character in *Fight Club* is defined as a mid-level technocrat, and the things he owns are demarcated as less expensive than those things owned by, for instance, Michael Douglas's financier character in *The Game* (US, 1997, David Fincher), but they are absolutely comparable to the things

which we assume Douglas' character owns in *Falling Down* (US, 1992, Joel Schumacher), or those owned by Griffin Dunne's character in *After Hours* (US, 1983, Martin Scorsese). The audience's ability to discern differential status between these characters is a confirmation, as well as a reinscription, of its own consumer knowledge. In these instances, one of the ideological functions of contemporary films is clearly to normalize consumerism, and perpetuate the internalization of social hierarchies, organized around shopping. For instance, in films about professionals, the audience's ability to discern subtle narrative and character meanings is often a condition of their own understanding of, and commitment to, consumer "power."

It follows that professionals in the movies should be understood as representatives of privilege, legitimating the class society from which they emerge. But the display of wealth (i.e., the food, the wardrobe, the crafted bodies, the haircuts, the lofts and condominiums, the kitchens and living rooms, the vehicles and personal technology) is not only a representation of the legitimacy of hegemonic class relations, but the beginning of a critique of those class relations - because we also understand that all this wealth and security is about to be challenged in violent film spectacles. These stories routinely tell us that the professionals who defend such wealth are not necessarily in control, and their personal well-being is contingent on the maintenance of normative capitalist property relations. In *Bamboozled* (US, 2000, Spike Lee), Damon Wayan's television writer/producer Pierre Delacroix explains that while he hates his job, he cannot afford to quit, because he will be sued for breach of contract, and thus unable to maintain his lifestyle. Specifically, Delacroix wants to avoid losing his clock tower condominium, and yet the crises he sets in motion make it obvious that, although he lives in a clock tower, he still does not "know what time it is". Audiences realize that these characters have various problems and crises that actually have their source in the very commodities of middle class living that are on display. Curiously, while these films get us thinking about buying things, they also suggest that the American Dream is risky and that, as "having things" becomes an overdeveloped "value" in the North, the crises that visit the middle class become a series of twisted admissions that, in the language of *Fight Club*, "the things you own, own you."

In translating these dense class-based stories, popular movies also tell us that professionals are special types of workers, as well as being "special" people. In *Fearless* (US, 1993, Barry Levinson), the architect hero, played by Jeff Bridges, walks away from a plane crash and finds himself alienated from his middle class life and friends. He pursues a spiritual quest, aided in part by Rosie Perez's working class character, a co-survivor of the plane crash. In order for both of them to come to terms with the trauma of the crash, he concocts a radical form of DIY therapy which sees him slamming his luxury vehicle into a brick wall. There are several references to God and redemption in this scene, and we are led to believe that the therapy is successful, but the sequence also implies that destruction of one's objects, and threats to life, are necessary components of middle class emancipation. This theme is worked out *ad nauseum* in films featuring professionals in crisis: in *Fight Club*, Ed Norton's character is also liberated by a car crash, which is called "a near life experience" in the film; *ditto* the characters in Cronenberg's *Crash* (Canada, 1996); and in *What Dreams May Come* (US, 1998, Vincent Ward), Robin Williams' doctor dies in a car crash, but is thus reunited with his children who have already gotten to heaven in their own smash-up. In *Pacific Heights* (US, 1990, John Schlesinger), the yuppies finally get possession of their dream house only to have it possess *them*, eventually liberating

themselves by killing a tenant and selling the house to another unsuspecting (i.e., uninitiated) pair of urban professionals. Barry Grant has observed that the film culture which depicts these professionals often portrays their crises as horrific and he argues that, while this cycle of films borrows from the structure of classic American horror films, "yuppie horror" is particularly focused on "monstrous *others*" that include job hungry females, inner city residents, the working class, and "material fears," including the "seeming oxymoron of the terrible luxury home".[vii] Aviva Briefel and Sianne Ngai have also described the ways in which possessions have engendered fear for the middle class, "as if fear itself were a commodity included in the total package."[viii] As Grant says, "because of the valorization of conspicuous wealth in the yuppie worldview…the monsters in yuppie horror films tend to threaten materiality more than mortality."

In most of these films, when a professional survives a threat, to life or lifestyle, they are represented as redeemed. In *Regarding Henry* (US, 1991, Mike Nichols) and *The Doctor* (US, 1991, Randa Haines), the professionals played by Harrison Ford and William Hurt respectively, are revitalized through threat of death; in *American Beauty* (US, 1999, *Sam Mendes*), Kevin Spacey's executive gains esteem by throwing decorum to the wind, as is the case with stockbroker Stella/Angela Bassett in *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* (US, 1998, Kevin Rodney Sullivan). Meg Ryan, Jeff Bridges and Nicholas Cage's characters all gain liberation from the tedium of their professional lives in, respectively, *You've Got Mail* (US, 1998, Nora Ephron), *The Fisher King* (US, 1991, Terry Gilliam) and *The Family Man* (US, 2000, Brett Ratner). Their uncharacteristic display of vulnerability is intended to suggest that they are "letting themselves go" or "losing it," in order to find a "kindler, gentler" version of themselves reborn. In *Fearless*, Jeff Bridges hits the jackpot because he is reborn as a spiritualized yuppie but, because he is also the recipient of a huge legal settlement that derives from same plane crash, he comes out of his crisis both spiritually and financially blessed. In *Fight Club*, Ed Norton's character feels transcendent when he claims that "losing everything was freedom" and, in *The Game*, the clichéd theme of constant threat in professional lives, is used as a running gag. In a scene in which Michael Douglas' character is trapped in the back seat of a driverless cab, we share his extreme panic, which ultimately prepares us to also share his relief, when he escapes and is metaphorically baptized and reborn, after the cab has plunged into San Francisco Bay. While some of these films feature women, by and large, these movies are attempts to redeem recently de-legitimated male privilege in the North.[9] The overwhelming impression is that professional men's lives are fraught with difficulties and hardship, even in the face of extraordinary privilege. For instance, while cab rides are a luxury for most of the world's population, and actually quite a banal component of daily life (especially for the driver), it seems "normal" in these films to see cab rides (as in *After Hours* and *The Game*) as potential sites of catastrophe.

These are clearly extreme image constructions, both in terms of the wealth and suffering on display, but I would argue that the films have found an audience because their characters successfully represent and transcode middle class audience's own confusion and misunderstanding about their place in the world. The recent work of Nora Ephron, for instance, has been very popular, and it is no surprise that it has featured middle class professionals and entrepreneurs exclusively. Her earlier work, by contrast, was dedicated to stories of working class women's lives, culminating in her script for the counter-hegemonic film *Silkwood* (US, 1983, Mike Nichols), which told a story of corporate negligence that took aim at de-regulation and "Reaganism." Ephron's career took off in the

1990's and this can be attributed to her success in telling stories about professional characters and their crises, the very group that supported Reagan and neo-liberal economic reform. For example, the popularity of *Sleepless In Seattle* (US, 1993) lies not only in star power, or effective screenwriting and direction, or even in the happy ending, but in its ability to negotiate, for middle class audiences, the tedium of single parenting, dating and office culture, by presenting a narrative that reproduces (and redeems) the *torture* which is single parenting, dating and office culture.

Not surprisingly, the attempt to redeem professional characters actually engenders peculiar moral lessons, which sometimes sit awkwardly with mainstream ideas about appropriate social behaviour. A notorious example is *Indecent Proposal* (US, 1993, Adrian Lyne), in which Woody Harrelson's architect character agonizes over whether he should build his dream house or pimp his wife, played by Demi Moore. The film's lesson is not so much that this is irredeemable behaviour, but that such torturous ethical dilemmas are the price of escaping the tedium of home ownership. Similarly, suicide and near fatal wounding are sometimes represented as acceptable strategies in the purification of professionals, and these reactions are not represented as amoral or decisively corrupt, but as instrumental to professional happiness and integrity. The films almost seem to coax us to "help" professionals, by hurting or killing them and, for the middle class, the professional in crisis film serves as something of a survival guide for globalization.

PART 3: **Our Own Private Fight Club**

"Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose."
—Kris Kristofferson, "Me and Bobbie McGee"

One of the more remarkable films about white collar crisis is *Fight Club,* and it is also a film which offers itself as potential social criticism, in the shape of popular entertainment. In large part, it is a powerful film because it works to intensify affect on a variety of levels. The storytelling, the acting, the lighting and sound, are designed to exaggerate the emotional meaning of each scene. Also, it *connects* with its audience because its allegorical structure provides a safe context within which viewers can encounter a series of potentially counter-hegemonic ideas and representations, without feeling the need to literally engage with the consequences of these ideas. In this film, apocalypse is not a fate delivered by foreign or alien others: it is the "natural consequence" of a world run by professionals in crisis. When Ed Norton's world comes crashing down, it is because his biggest wish is to end his pain in capitalism. He wants to put an end to the torture of feeling "indebted" to the system, all the while feeling like a "cog in the wheel". He recognizes that his freedom is somehow connected to the end of capitalism, and throughout the film, the audience becomes absorbed by the various strategies deployed in the attempt to bring capital to a halt, including art pranks, vandalism, and terrorism. *Fight Club* allows its audiences to imagine revolution, but it also says that this fantasy can never be realized, because its articulation is censored in the conscious life of the very workers who need it. The apocalyptic tone of the film expresses the thwarted desire of every low level professional, to bite the hand that feeds, and to break out of the "prison" of capital.

Fight Club tells the story of its central character's mental breakdown – we meet him as he prepares to kill himself, and the film's story is a recounting of how he got to the point of wishing himself dead in America, at the dawn of the new millennium, no less!

Ed Norton's character is a car company technocrat who calculates the liability cost of car crashes, and then advises his superiors on the financial viability of accepting or denying responsibility for technological failure. He applies "the formula" to car accidents, measuring corporate culpability against charred human remains, and this dehumanizing job is replicated in his consumer lifestyle, which he understands as a poor substitute for human fulfillment. He complains of insomnia, but really his problem lies in the fact that he can only dream about what it would be like to be conscious. In these dreams, the world of the "fight club" emerges, and it is in this unconscious world that we encounter the characters of the film, including Norton's alter-egos, Marla Singer, who he "meets" in therapy, and Tyler Durden, who he "meets" on a business flight.

Like so many other professionals in the movies, Norton is lost in America but seeking redemption. He is a proletarianized white collar technocrat, but he identifies with the lifestyles of the ruling class. He is a "functionary," and the stress he feels from this is not the price of freedom, but the standard of life in hell. The "formula" which he applies to car crashes is part of his special skill, and this gives him access to a privileged lifestyle, but it is also an example of instrumentalized knowledge. The "formula" is a measure of dehumanization, an objectification and abstraction of the modern world. In fact, a fellow worker jokes that the outcomes of car accidents are perversely analogous to modernist art, abstract depictions of the collision between nature and culture. Norton feels this abstraction as personal stress and as degradation of his (and everyone's) humanity. He understands that, to the extent that decisions can be made on the basis of his detached measurement of the world, he is ethically responsible (although never legally guilty). He also comes to understand that he is as "measurable" as the car crash victims, and just as easily objectified. This leaves him vulnerable to obsolescence (i.e., anyone can do a job that relies on a "formula"), as well as contributing to his feeling of isolation (which is also the predictable outcome of his atomized lifestyle). In *Fight Club,* this objectification of, and indifference to, the world and humans highlights Norton's alienation from society, precipitating his withdrawal to a world organized by the desires of his unconscious, surrounded by figments of his imagined identity. The theme of professional narcissism is emphasized by Norton's voiceover commentary, which works to draw us into his perspective exclusively, so that the pain, to which he subjects himself and others, is also experienced by the audience. Moreover, there is a suggestion that his pain and suffering lead to clarity and, in one instance, Norton claims that, after the "fight clubs" were established, the members "began to see things differently". In a way, Norton convinces himself that he has become enlightened and, in this sense, the film ironically suggests that the freedom and utopia of professional life is directly related to the degree of torture one can survive.

Despite the fact that it seems as though the events in the film are really happening, the filmmaker presents the alter-egos and their parallel domain quite clearly as figments of Ed Norton's imagination. For instance, the film literally begins in his head, amongst the synapses of the brain, signaling to us that the "internal life" of the central character will be significant to the story. We are introduced to Marla and Bob, both of whom are parodies of what Ed Norton's character understands as feminized gender behaviour (e.g., a "phallic" woman, and a "muscle" man with breasts), and these characters help us recognize the psychological and emotional pain that "characterizes" modern life. As figments of Norton's fantasy life, Marla and Bob move through the world as affect only – they have no physical presence in Norton's work life,

but they share symptoms and therapies with him. Similarly, all the members of the "fight clubs," including their pranks and actions, are fantasies. As well, Brad Pitt's libidinous Tyler Durden is a fantasy, joining the story only after the straight-laced, "formula"-applying Norton expresses his wish to die in a mid-air crash. Throughout the first part of the film, Tyler has attempted to push his way into Norton's story, appearing initially as glitches under the surface of the film, but he only becomes "conscious" after Norton's therapy with Bob and Marla has failed, and after his "death wish". The film con-firms that Tyler is the manifestation of the "return of the repressed" on several occasions. For instance, towards the cli-max, Tyler explains that he is everything Norton would want to be, a "wish fulfillment". As he says, it has to be that way, because nobody would believe that Norton would suffice as Pitt's repressed desire. The realization that Tyler is a fantasy really hits home when Norton's recollection of events shows us that it is *he* who has blown up the condo, fought those fights, pulled those pranks, and flown all those miles (for his job, the real "fight club") and, when the police call (almost comically representing the "Law of the Father"), only Norton thinks that his alter-ego is a distinctly other person.

Other tips that Norton's life is fractured by unconscious desire and repressed memories include the subterranean "orders" which he receives from Tyler in the house; as well as his own observation that Tyler and Marla remind him of his parents, never in the same room together (...paging Dr. Freud!). Marla is an ambivalent figure of desire for Ed Norton's character, a free-spirited iconoclast who is clearly a threat to the propriety of middle class life. When Marla steals clothes from the laundromat, sells them to a used clothing store, and moves ethereally through traffic (leaving Norton behind, as he tries to avoid being hit by cars), we are meant to read her as a fantasy figure and this is confirmed, in the channeling session, when he imagines her as his "power animal." In fact, try as he will, Norton cannot repress Marla, and though he ruthlessly marginalizes her in favour of Tyler, she consistent-ly returns to disrupt the development of Tyler's masculinist "Project Mayhem." In a suggestive sequence, near the end of the film, after Norton has shot himself in his efforts to "kill" Tyler, Marla reappears by way of a bus which pulls up outside the skyscraper in which the final scene takes place. On the surface this is a banal image, perfunctory in a sense, but the name of the bus line is *Direct Bus*, and knowing Fincher's clar-ity in referencing brands throughout the rest of the film, this "no-brand" reference sticks out like a sore thumb. Is *Direct Bus*

Pacific Heights

American Beauty

Falling Down

a reference to a "direct bus" (in the language of electronics), defined as a direct point of access and signal transmission? It is a good pun, and it helps us understand that, with Tyler's "death," Marla is able to return to the primal scene of the film, *via* direct access to Norton's unconscious. After all the crises and destructive impulses which are associated with Tyler's masculine alter-ego, Marla re-emerges as Norton's real comfort in a world of white middle class male alienation. The feminine energy and identity which she represents has a "direct bus" into his subjectivity, but she has been allowed there only after he has shot himself, killing off the Tyler in him, and too late to save the "world".

The film repeatedly gives the audience clues as to the liminal nature of its reality, but the power of the film rests on its ability to portray the unconscious world as activist-oriented, by contrast especially to the somnambulist alienation which characterizes Ed Norton's "real" job and lifestyle. As well, the film makes it clear that the "fight club" exists solely in Norton's mind, and that the solutions which he imagines are symptomatic of masculinity bred on individualist heroism, misogynist violence, vengeance, and delusional paranoia. One of the film's central themes is that "normal" men are raised to be monsters, routinely confined by work, gender and lifestyle conformity. Moreover, *Fight Club* is a criticism of racist and patriarchal capitalism, to the extent that it associates the phenomenon of vigilantes and paramilitarism with Norton's repressed destructive desires. The almost unbearable scene, in which Pitt threatens the Korean convenience store employee, makes clear the extent to which violent libertarian beliefs are socially dysfunctional and politically retrograde. At the end of the film, as Norton and Marla watch shiny skyscrapers explode and burn, we are encouraged to imagine what the outcome would have been if Marla, not Tyler, had organized Norton's psychic life.

The form of the film reflects several aspects of urban dramas, including motifs from the *film noir*, crime films and gangster films, and it is closely related to the action thriller and especially the conspiracy film. It is also indebted to Expressionism, in the sense that it provides figuration of an extreme mental and emotional state. This is a remarkably rich aesthetic tradition in film culture, and is used repeatedly to represent mental breakdowns and personal and social crisis. In *Fight Club*, the fights are visualizations of what is going on in Norton's head, "projections" from a professional in crisis, and Tyler's flamboyance and Marla's neurosis are both aspects of these "mental movies". On the one hand, Norton knows that he must strike a balance between a masculine and feminine identity, but his job alienation and subjugation within capitalism have forced him to react in as defensive and hostile a manner as possible. So he adopts Tyler's narcissistic masculinity as a survival tactic. The film concludes by showing that this choice is absolutely the wrong one for him, and the world.

The film parallels the Norton character's situation with that of many American white males and, in particular, those who find comfort in the libertarian roots of American survivalism. This "tradition" goes back to

the American Patriots, and the ideology has been cited as inspiring contemporary paramilitary activities and organizations, as well as being associated with such recent "homegrown" terrorism in the extreme "civil disobedience" of Operation Rescue, as well as the bombing of the federal buildings in Oklahoma City. The film, in fact, makes explicit reference to Oklahoma City, in its depiction of explosives planted in a van in an underground parkade. It also makes reference to the notion that, in the "post-national" future, paramilitary and guerilla warfare tactics will be commonplace and mandatory. But the film depicts this situation as deplorable, and its moral condemnation can be seen in its representation of the members of "Project Mayhem" as a mindless, homogeneous and illegal army of goons.

The film's perspective is that contemporary capitalism is enough to make you want to kill yourself. More precisely, the film represents life in capitalism as already a version of death, to the extent that it is regimented by an ethic which denigrates the authentic and the real, in favour of the copy and simulations ("everything was a copy of a copy of a copy" is what Ed Norton's character tells us). We see that people make themselves over (physically and spiritually) in order to "have a happy" in capitalism. But it is made clear that this is a form of protracted survivalism, and the film repeatedly tells us that such nihilism is an inappropriate, if typical, response to globalization. It is interesting to compare the narrative structure of *Fight Club* with that of the famous German Expressionist film *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (Germany, 1919, Robert Wiene), which similarly presents a distorted film world as the projection of the central character's subjective reaction to social crisis. As Siegfried Kracauer points out, the film's political meaning is conservative when the narration brackets the criticism of totalitarianism as the misguided ramblings of the demented central character, effectively changing the *social* crisis into an individuated *personal* crisis.[10] By contrast, the stuff that makes *Fight Club*'s central character "crazy," also makes the audience "crazy" and, in this way, there is a sense that the fans of the film recognize themselves in the "fight club".

The *chiaroscuro* visual style of the film also encourages strong emotional reactions. In particular, the Expressionist effects contribute to a sense that Norton's world is both unsettled and constricted. Busy and cluttered sets, ceilings and spaces that seem to constrain their characters, and an overall sense of confinement, help the audience understand the stranglehold that the world has on the protagonist. The use of such Expressionist techniques is common to many recent films that criticize the suffocation experienced in middle class life. In Todd Haynes' *SAFE* (US, 1995), for instance, the overwhelming constriction which defines the characters' social relations is represented by a variety of closed and tight spaces and frame compositions, culminating in the protagonist's retreat to a hermetically sealed safe, from which she peers at the world of the audience. In *Fight Club*, the fights happen at night, creating the sense that the space is limited by the pain and agony of each individual, and this is emphasized in the scenes in the low-ceiling basement of the bar, where the contests offer no hope of escape from a world of masculine brutality. This sense of closure is accentuated in the film on a narrative level, as well, in that the flashback structure situates the characters (and spectators) in a story that has already happened, in which we have appeared at "the end of history," as it were. In downbeat flashback narratives, like *Fight Club*, we are witnesses to devolution, knowing there is nothing the protagonist can do to escape the impending crisis.

Fight Club resonates with its audiences on a number of levels. Clearly, the action and iconography of the fight, the struggle, and the ethos of white urban survivalism, are central to the film's meaning. But it is Tyler Durden, as played by Brad Pitt, who has become one of the most highly regarded elements of the film. His propensity for outlandish spectacle and sloganeering, of course, make him cinematic, but his role as the Id, the repressed, the libidinal, and the monster, also introduces the possibility of the film's trenchant criticism of life in capitalism. As Ed Norton's *other*, Tyler's freedom from censure allows him to articulate a number of insights into the crisis which confronts young workers in capitalism. He says that the problems lie with "lifestyle obsessions," and he points out, that the affect of capital is to confuse us about our real social relations. In a subtle and valuable scene, Ed Norton and Pitt get on a public bus, and "they" comment on a Calvin Klein ad that features male models with typically thin and muscular bodies, like Brad Pitt's, for instance. Pitt exclaims that these are unrealistic ideals, and denounces perfection—but, in reality, this is Ed Norton's character saying this. Of course, with his less-than-perfect body, he would say this, all the while longing to look like Brad Pitt, who is exactly like (and has been) the man in the ad. Here, the will to resist capital is fully entwined with the desire for things. In *Fight Club*, the spectacle of narcissistic masculinity is represented as a symptom of globalization, the New World Order's repressed "structure of feeling". And, as affect, such spectacles of professionals in crisis not only capture our attention and sympathies, with stories that allude to the real world, but, in doing so, they tend to also obscure our understanding of contemporary capitalism.

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NOTES
1. The concept of "structure of feeling" is borrowed from Raymond Williams. He described the concept as follows: "We are then defining these elements as a 'structure': as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension. Yet we are also defining a social experience which is still *in process*." *Marxism and Literature* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1977), 132.
2. Henry Giroux, "Brutalized Bodies and Emasculated Politics: *Fight Club*, Consumerism and Masculine Violence," *Breaking In To The Movies: Film and the Culture of Politics* (Malden, MS: Blackwell, 2002), 258-288.
3. Amy Taubin, "So Good It Hurts," *Sight and Sound* (November 1999), 16.
4. Mark Crispin Miller, "Advertising: The Big Picture," *Seeing Through Movies*, ed. Mark Crispin Miller (NY: Pantheon, 1990), 244.
5. Karl Marx, "Crises Theory," *The Marx-Engels Reader* [2d ed.], ed. Robert C. Tucker (NY: Norton, 1978 [1972]), 445.
6. Erik Olin Wright, *Classes* (London: Verso, 1985); John R. Hall, ed., *Reworking Class* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Arthur J. Vidich, ed., *The New Middle Classes: Life-styles, Status Claims and Political Orientations* (NY: New York University Press, 1995); Klaus Eder, *The New Politics of Class* (London: Sage Publications, 1993); Carl Boggs, *Intellectuals and the Crisis of Modernity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); Alvin W. Gouldner, *The Future of Intellectuals and the Rise of the New Class: A Frame of Reference, Theses, Conjectures, Arguments, and an Historical Perspective on the Role of Intellectuals and Intelligentsia in the International Class Contest of the Modern Era* (NY: Continuum, 1979); Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (NY: Monthly Review Press, 1974); Burton Bledstein, *The Culture of Professionalism: The Middle Class and the Development of Higher Education in America* (NY: Norton, 1976).
7. Barry Grant, "Rich and Strange: The Yuppie Horror Film," in *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, ed. Steven Neale and Murray Smith (NY: Routledge, 1998), 280-293.
8. Aviva Briefel and Sianne Ngai, "'How much did you pay for this place?': Fear, Entitlement, and Urban Space in Bernard Rose's Candyman," *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture and Media Studies* 37 (January 1996), 71.
9. Viveca Gretton and Tom Orman, "Regarding Men: Disease and Affliction in Contemporary Melodrama," *Cineaction* 26/27 (1992), 115; Jude Davis, "Gender, Ethnicity and Cultural Crisis in *Falling Down* and *Groundhog Day*," *Screen* 36:3 (Autumn 1995), 214-232.
10. Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological Study of the German Film* (NY: Noonday, 1959 [1947]), 67. He explains that, "In *Caligari* (and several other films of the time) the device of a framing story was not only an aesthetic form, but also had symbolic content. [...] Even though *Caligari* had become a conformist film, it preserved and emphasized this revolutionary story – as a madman's fantasy."

Allegorical Figurations and the Political Didactic in *Bulworth*
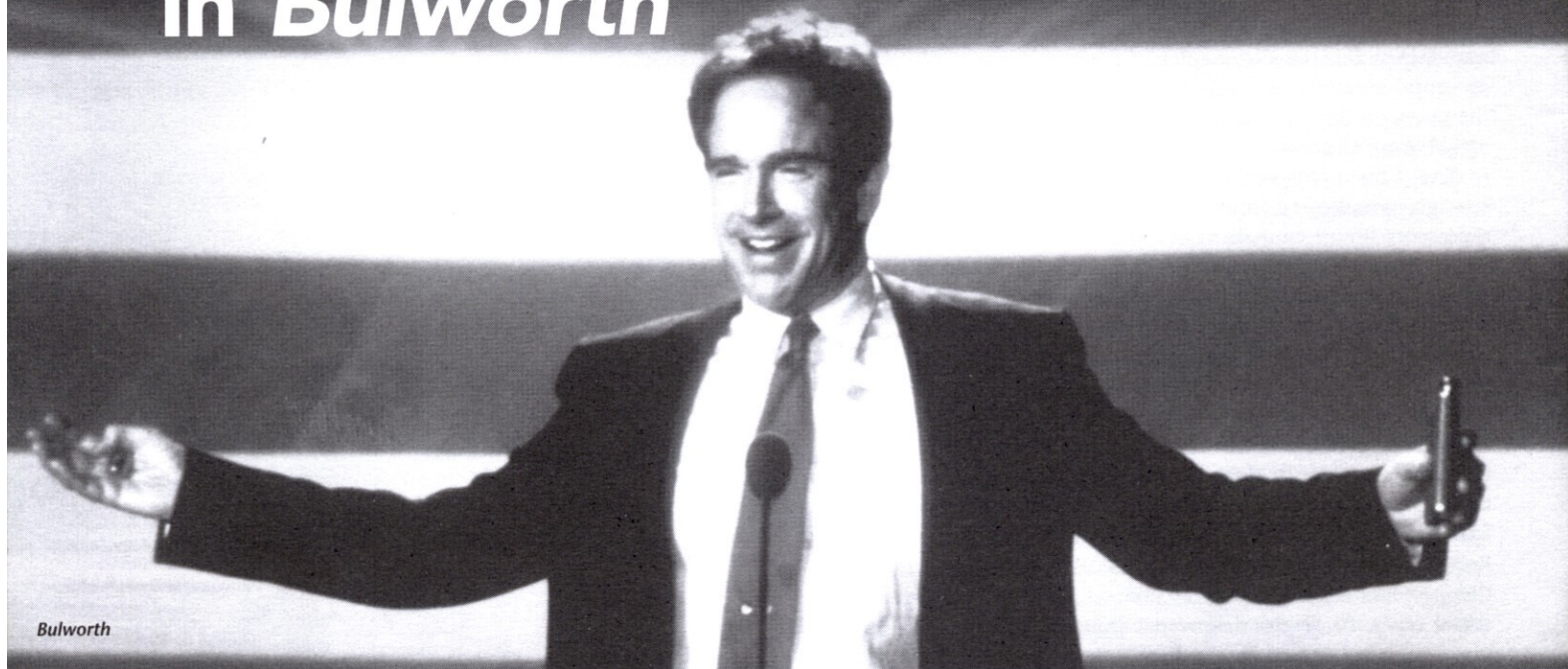
Bulworth

Why do you think there are no more black leaders?

—Senator Bulworth/Warren Beatty

Some People think it's because they all got killed, but I think it has more to do with the decimation of the manufacturing base in the urban centers.

Senator, an optimistic, energized population throws up optimistic, energized leaders, and when you shift manufacturing to the Sun Belt and the Third World you destroy the blue-collar core of the black activist population.

Some people would say the problem is purely cultural, but the power of the media that is continually controlled by fewer and fewer people, add to that monopoly of the media, a consumer culture that's based on self-gratification, and you're not likely to have a population that wants leadership that calls for self sacrifice.

But the fact is I'm just a materialist at heart because I look at the economic base; high domestic employment means jobs for African Americans; World War II meant lots of jobs for black folk; that is what energized the community for the civil rights movement of the 50s and 60s. An energized, hopeful community will not only produce leaders but more importantly it will produce leaders they'll respond to.

Now what do you think Senator?

Nina/Halle Berry

BY REAGAN ROSS

Warren Beatty's *Bulworth* is a political film in a long line of recent popular political films that have come out of Hollywood, films such as *Dave* (Ivan Reitman, 1993), *The American President* (Rob Reiner, 1995), *Nixon* (Oliver Stone, 1995), *The Rainmaker* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1997), *Primary Colors* (Mike Nichols, 1998) and *Erin Brockovich* (Steven Soderbergh, 2000). These films feign political commentary but often something more banal (romance, biography, suspense) materializes. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. deftly articulates this sentiment when he says that "there are Hollywood films about politics and there are Hollywood films about love affairs, but the former are hardly more likely to have actual political content than the latter are to depict actual sexual penetration. Instead, both genres have evolved elaborate cinematic vocabularies of indirection."[1] However, I would argue that Warren Beatty's *Bulworth* reproduces the serious popular political films that came out of Hollywood in the late 60s and early 70s. Unlike that transitional period of filmmaking, when Hollywood took more risks— testing the counter-culture waters, trying to find material and styles that would consistently lure audiences, and willing to give power to "auteurist" (political) visions—today Hollywood commodifies to such a degree that almost all mainstream Hollywood films coalesce around profit (safe) formulas: blockbusters franchise films (sequel mania!), popular genre films, event

pictures, and prestige pictures. Currently, with some exceptions, substantive political projects are typically "off-Hollywood" (e.g., *Happiness, Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai, Requiem for a Dream*). And the exceptions usually either come wrapped in a disguised (genre) package (*American Psycho*) or get made by "stars" with clout (*Bulworth*, Tim Robbins' *Cradle Will Rock*).
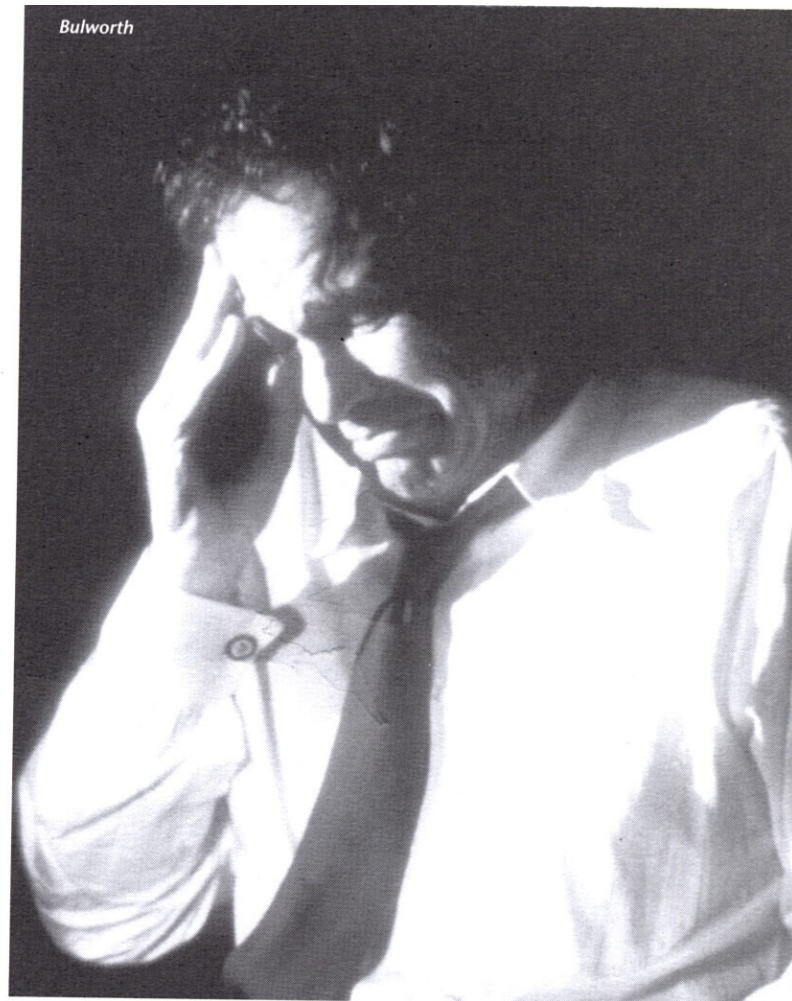
Bulworth's similarity to the films of the late 60s/early 70s offer us another important insight. Like many of the films of this period (e.g., *2001: A Space Odyssey, They Shoot Horses, Don't They?, Medium Cool, Little Big Man*, to name just a few), which registered the radical ruptures going on at the time, *Bulworth* also reveals historical conditions at large presently. More specifically, *Bulworth* offers us a political treatise that "maps" the postmodern condition and the dominant order of "late capitalism."

For my analysis of this film I offer a three-part model that I have developed for a larger project that I am working on, a project that supposes the viability of an oppositional popular cinema. My proposal does not displace but rather complements the still reigning critical paradigm for the political in film, the avant-gardist polemic of the post-'68 French film groups e.g., journals such as *Cahiers du Cinéma* and *Cinétheque*, filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard, and organizations such as the Dziga Vertov group. In short, that paradigm viewed an oppositional aesthetic largely from a marginal position: Texts that positioned themselves "outside" of the dominant social order and that eschewed the "illusionist" cinema of Hollywood could best oppose the dominant social order. However, I argue that though this paradigm is still important for us today, it does not address concerns brought on by the changing political landscape, as I will show in a moment.

I call the first part of my model the "political didactic." At present, most scholars and critics view the didactic in art derisively. However, this attitude has not always been the prevailing one. Indeed, the didactic aesthetic was seen as a natural part of classical antiquity art (split between two traditions, Hesiodic piety and Lucretian science). Moreover, political content suffused much of the art at this time. It wasn't until the onset of modernity that the political didactic diminished significantly, exchanged for a more expressive aesthetic (i.e., Kant's "purposiveness without purpose").

Today, though, because most spaces in society (art, academic, religious, familial, political) have become commodified and reified, and thus neutralized as spaces of real opposition or debate, a return to a didactic aesthetic is needed. Indeed, though a primary agent of this commodification and reification, popular (didactic) cultural texts may be the last site where real engagement with serious social and political issues are possible for mass audiences. Henry A. Giroux says something quite similar when addressing the progressive pedagogical possibilities of film: "The decline of public life demands that we use film as a way of raising questions that are increasingly lost to the forces of market relations, commercialization, and privatization…. [F]ilm may provide one of the few mediums left that enables conversations that connect politics, personal experiences, and public life to larger social issues."[2] Because of this utter commodification and reification of American culture, and this lack of real oppositional spaces, a popular (didactic) aesthetic becomes one possible way to offer mass audiences some respite from this loss. Though most popular art does indeed lack any real political content, there are some exceptions. And when that rarity does happen, when serious political content is packaged in popular aesthetic forms, the result can be tremendous. I can attest to this result in my own teaching experiences, where I have seen students engage in material (even Marxism!) that they might not have otherwise engaged in.

Cultural studies theorist and Marxist scholar Fredric Jameson also argues for the need of a didactic aesthetic. In the face of a postmodern condition that commodifies, reifies, and, overall, fragments the "social totality," Jameson believes that we need an aesthetic that "allow[s] social phenomena once again to become transparent, as moments of the struggle between classes."[3] And, indeed, *Bulworth* "transparently" (or didactically) reveals the current postmodern condition.

The second part of my model also comes from Jameson. In his seminal essay "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture," Jameson suggests that popular art contains "utopian impulses" and allows for consumer "anxieties" to rise to the surface, temporarily allowing us to "rewrite" the social order in utopic terms, as a "renewal of the social order."[4] This "renewal of the social order" means overcoming class divisions and antagonisms, surfacing the rage and resentment of the masses towards the social order (only to displace it elsewhere), and imagining social collectivity (e.g., family, community, society). Though Jameson emphasizes that these "utopian impulses" and "anxieties" are typically re-contained in the end, I want to raise the possibility of a text that allows for these potentially revolutionary drives to remain intact.

The third part of my model deals directly with a key aspect of postmodernism. In his momentous book *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System*, Jameson expands on an important part of his theorization of the concept postmodernism. Jameson largely defines postmodernism in periodizing terms, designating the present postmodern period as a shift to "late capitalism." In part, the rise of an omniscient multinational, global corporate entity distinguishes this shift. Jameson says that the enormity and complexity of this entity—and its covert nature—make it unrepresentable. He suggests that it can only be represented allegorically. And art becomes the prime object where this allegorical "mapping" can take place. Moreover, because of its imagistic and

spatial features, film becomes the ideal aesthetic to best actuate this mapping process.

For me, *Bulworth* fulfills all of these components. Beatty reveals the signs of "late capitalism": corporate power and influence, commodification and reification, globalization, and the obfuscation of class differences. He also didactically addresses such social and political concerns as corporate downsizing, the lack of a livable wage, racial profiling, children dealing drugs, the horrendous condition of low income schools and neighborhoods, and a lack of health insurance for the poor.

This "political didactic" on Beatty's part functions as a counter program to the hegemonic influences that permeate society everyday. Beatty taps into the distinct layer of discontent on the part of the populace. When Bulworth speaks the "truth" it becomes instantly recognizable as the opposite of what we usually hear from politicians, and when Bulworth deconstructs his own image, we see just what a construct image has become. Further, this "political didactic," or counter didactic, also reveals what people already know or suspect, that politicians trade favors for money, that corporations run the media and thus the dispersion of information, and that class disparities still matter.

In other words, Beatty taps into those "utopian impulses" and "anxieties" that Jameson referred to, by revealing to us the hidden realities below the surface. The film also taps into the "utopian" in another telling way, in the allegorical (American) embodiment of collectivity, Bulworth himself.

I want to begin my analysis with the third part of my model, how we can examine a postmodern film allegorically to see how it reflects the multinational, globalized corporate apparatus.

This allegorical reading begins with the opening shot of the Capitol building. Looming in the distance, rain coming down, thunder booming, the Capitol building already signifies distance and a sense of gloom. We then get a cut to a shot of a "Do Not Enter" sign with the Capitol building in the background. As we shall see, the Capitol building has become re-allegorized. Instead of symbolizing the country and the people, it symbolizes corporate power and a representation of power cut off from the masses.

This opening begins a series of rhetorical reversals and juxtapositions that reveal this shifting postmodern landscape. In particular, Beatty inverts traditional American symbols and shows how their meaning has been displaced by other meanings. In addition to the opening shot of the Capitol building, we see this most strikingly in a dissolve of the American flag into several limousines. In

two other remarkable shots, during the "obscenities" speech by Bulworth, we see two exquisite shots of L.D. (Don Cheadle), the drug dealer, positioned in front of an American flag. The first shot positions him next to a sign that says "cash," and the second comes on a cut where Bulworth ends his sentence with the word "slave." Both shots reverse the symbolic meaning of the flag, the first again associating it with money and the second with the oppressive conditions of the lower class and African Americans. We also see the colors red, white, and blue played throughout. Bulworth wears a red, white, and blue suit and is later reborn into a red, white, and blue gangsta rap outfit. Many of the spaces that Bulworth enters are tinged with blues, reds, and greens. Indeed, at times it seems that the pattern of red, white, and blue is replaced by the pattern of red, *green*, and blue. We see this in the nightclub sequence where at various times Bulworth enters rooms that are coded one of the these three colors. The color green in particular strategically specifies spaces or characters associated with greed. We see this in Vinnie's (Richard C. Sarafian) office space. We also see this briefly during the pre-debate set-up, around Graham Crockett (Paul Sorvino), the corrupt insurance man, and in the hospital space. The allegorical connotations are obvious: American symbols are now associated with power, status, and wealth.

This entrance to Bulworth's life is telling. The camera pan from the Capitol building to Bulworth's office space, with the canned ad of Bulworth's campaign ad playing in the background, signifies the close attachment between the two and further reinforces the notion of not only Bulworth's commodification but the commodification of the Capitol building as well. Next, his name appears in a deserted *empty* hallway. Lightning flashes as his name, the title of the film, appears, highlighting his name, conspicuously set against a janitor's work cart. The beginning juxtaposition between upper and lower classes, which we have already seen implied, dynamically manifests itself here. The dichotomy of power and powerlessness – Bulworth himself, the Capitol building, and the upper crust architectural surroundings of the building versus the janitor cart, a blue collar symbol – sets up a class conscious binary that Beatty tries to re-establish throughout the movie.

In the space of his office, we first see Bulworth, the camera at a high angle and a long shot highlighting his weakened state. This long shot also reveals Bulworth watching his canned campaign ad. The shot creates an interesting sort of mirror effect, highlighting what we soon come to know, that this is a man falling apart, split between the commodified, artificial politician (in the ad) and the man of integrity that used to exist. Multiple dissolves of the anguished Bulworth further emphasize his fragmented state.

Bulworth's continual replaying of his canned campaign ad (he is up for re-election) already suggests his pathological state. The replaying also serves to emphasize the artificiality of the ad and the ads of many real life politicians. Shots of important political and historical figures – Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, Rosa Parks, Bobby Kennedy, Huey P. Newton – and older pictures of Bulworth when he was younger (real photographs of Beatty with Bobby Kennedy and Huey P. Newton) glaringly contrast to the canned ads and the commodified Bulworth himself. Here we have another telling juxtaposition, this time between the canned, commodified Bulworth speaking his inane rhetoric and the historical figures of vision and consummate integrity. Bulworth's use of his family further cements his commodification. Some of his family pictures are turned away from him towards his prospective clients and customers, and his campaign ad includes using his family and his family space to sell his image.

Later, the images that replace his canned ad on the TV reinforce

this picture. He channel surfs through a sea of commodified images – professional wrestling, advertisements (particularly ads that objectify women), religious programming, infomercials, *The Simpsons*, classic films, the OJ Simpson trial, to name just a few – an extension of his own commodified and fragmented image. In between these images (pictures on wall and TV images/canned ad) is Bulworth, lacking sleep, not eating, and apparently having some sort of breakdown.

It is this pathological state, though, that allows Bulworth (and Beatty) the freedom to transgress in substantial ways against the corporate, homogenized world. Jameson describes the usefulness of the pathological character (coincidentally referring to Beatty's role as the anti-social character in *The Parallax View* [Alan J. Pakula, 1974]):

> **The dramatic, in other words what shakes the status quo and produces crisis as such, is difficult to derive or produce from out of the status quo of a non-transcendent universe, and must therefore be housed, *as a disturbing and unsettling force*, within the individual herself.**[5]

As "a disturbing and unsettling force," Bulworth's transgressions are possible *and permissible* because of his pathological separation from the norm, the norm here being the commodified and reified (dehumanized) world around him.

This opening sequence, then, becomes the anchor for the rest of the film. Not only is Bulworth's powerful position and pathological and commodified state established, we also learn why he decides not to kill himself (it seems he too was once a person of integrity and idealism). Moreover, we also get the all-important collectivized African American voice and the political message of idealism and lower class collectivity (the re-insertion of class distinctions) as a response against the corporate totality.

And, finally, we get a strong hint of the globalization element here as well, an essential part of the multinational, corporate apparatus. Bulworth gets a telephone call referring to pork belly stocks that apparently Bulworth had told to sell. The anonymous phone caller mentions that he just spoke to Hong Kong, a clear beginning signification of Bulworth's global connections. Other references emphasize this global connection as well. One secretary, Mrs. Dovish, mentions a Mr. Chow and Mr. Ling and that "yes the senator would love to have drinks with the sultan." Another secretary says "Mr. Fong and the Ching family left for Hong Kong; will Mr. And Mrs. Wang be in California?" And later, Bulworth's assistant, Dennis Murphy (Oliver Platt), hints that Bulworth is trying to secure the West Bank for Israel.

The most important point to note in these early scenes, though, is Bulworth's state of being: he is more dead (a "ghost") than alive. This status sets him up for a metaphorical rebirth. He moves out of this space of power and commodification into the more substantial space of the masses. To better understand the process Bulworth goes through, I have a better metaphor. Bulworth is a like an empty vessel, emptied out of anything meaningful; the journey he takes, and the people he encounters, fill him back up with substantive content. We know this because of the actions and language he imitates and, more importantly, by what he says in his "obscenities" speech. In terms of the former, for example, he starts rapping after the African American bum, or Rastaman, as he is referred to in the credits (significantly, played by activist poet and playwright Amiri Baraka), tells him to "sing." In the "obscenities" speech he almost verbatim re-conveys Nina's and L.D.'s monologues. Crucially, he also says to the rattled pundit, after he has recited Nina's speech, "What do you think my age

is?" Not only has he repeated Nina's monologue verbatim, but he has also repeated this seemingly inconsequential question she asks after her monologue. Bulworth is not only influenced by their views, he *transmits* their views to the world. He becomes like a sponge, absorbing everything around him, becoming the collective conduit of the masses.

Curiously, most writers entirely missed this critical maneuver by Beatty. For example, in his essay "The Confusions of Warren Beatty," Dana Polan says that "the inner-city crime boss [L.D.] ends up adopting Bulworth's philosophy as a mission statement for rebuilding the ghetto" and that "Bulworth's potential assassin Nina comes to fall for him (and his dream) and becomes part of his 'team.'"[6] These observations ignore the subtle nuances of both Bulworth's and Nina and L.D.'s transformation. Bulworth's rejuvenation begins with his breakdown and the ensuing lowering of his false, manufactured image, but it could not have been accomplished without the empowering encounters with those he meets on his journey, especially Nina and L.D. The empowerment may be reciprocal, but not until after Nina and L.D. do some of the empowering. In other words, L.D. and Nina don't just become wide-eyed sycophants, sheepishly following Bulworth. The film clearly communicates their astonishment at seeing Bulworth repeat their monologues. This gesture on Bulworth's part signals to them Bulworth's worth as a collective tool and their own worth as active agents.

Allegorically, then, Bulworth takes on the democratic meaning of an American symbol, something the traditional American symbols – the Capitol building, the American flag, and the American colors red, white, and blue – have lost. His rebirth is punctuated by a change of clothes. He changes from the sterile red, white, and blue suit of the corporations to the red, white, and blue of the masses, signified by a gangsta rap outfit (and this rebirth is nicely illustrated by the poster of the film, where the gangsta rap version of Bulworth is coming out of the mouth of the corporate version of Bulworth).

The next series of spaces that Bulworth moves through is revealing as well. First, these movements punctuate what I talk about above, the shedding of his corporate image and the replacement of it with a people's symbol. Second, we see the exterior/interior dichotomy of Bulworth act on these highly charged, symbolic spaces. Bulworth's emptied out interior belies his corporate exterior. The effect of this binary is not only funny but revelatory as well.

Bulworth's shocking break from political rhetoric begins at his first stop, a South Central Los Angeles African American church. The outrageousness of this break could simply be attributed to the constant canned, superficial rhetoric we hear virtually everyday by politicians. However, I believe it goes further than that. Bulworth has not only spoken a generalized "truth" but has done so in a highly charged personal space (personal at least to its patrons).

We see Bulworth attempt to read his tired speech but he can barely get past "we are approaching a new millennium." Bulworth's worth as a tool of corporate power collapses and he launches into his spontaneous crusade by responding "truthfully." Beatty I think purposely selects the black church for the beginning of Bulworth's transformation from corporate lackey to the people's symbol, not only because it is a people's space, but because the *old* Bulworth championed black rights.

This transformation also resonates because the church has become one of the black community's last refuge of a type of collectivity, but one that politicians continually colonize. In this space, African Americans clearly see their localized place in juxtaposition to a political machinery that undermines and commodi-

fies them. However, because Bulworth's corporate exterior collapses and his people's interior awakens, the congregation tips the scale of power in their favor.

Later in the film, another church sequence meaningfully contrasts to this space. Instead of power and wealth doing the colonizing, powerlessness and poverty colonize. Into the space of a highly affluent, white church, two of Nina's friends sing more "soulfully" than the white patrons, thereby, in effect, taking over the space. The comparison plays in terms of race and class differences, with the rich white patrons seeming impassive and the poor black patrons more "soulful." Several writers have complained about this aspect of the film. For example, Richard Alleva of *Commonweal* says, "the one genuinely offensive element in this film is an unintended one: the patronizing and ultimately dehumanizing way it puts black Americans on a pedestal,"[7] and Linda Holt says that "despite its knowing criticism of liberal responses to America's racial problems, the film still romanticizes black culture."[8] Further, Pat Dowell says, "The idea that black people are a font of human feeling and down-to-earth communal replenishment to which white folks must regularly return is a diehard concept in American culture."[9] While I basically agree with this criticism, I also think two qualifications should be raised, at least as this criticism pertains to this film. It seems to me that instead of focusing strictly on race, it might be more relevant to think about this issue in terms of class, collectivization, and commodification and reification.

First, segregation and oppression have in essence created an atmosphere where forced collectivization and strong religious beliefs were merely a mechanism of survival for African Americans. Most white Americans have not found it particularly necessary to hold on to this social and cultural mode of bonding. I believe these two church sequences mark this historical reference. Second, these so-called "soulful" moments are undermined from within as well. This particular black church belies any sense of hardship or struggle. In fact, this space contrasts not only meaningfully with the white church sequence as a contrast in wealth and sedateness versus poverty and "soulfulness," but also contrasts even more significantly with the other black spaces: the night club, the ghettoized streets (including those around the church itself), and the home of Nina. Unlike these other spaces, the church resonates with prosperity, signified by its architecture, décor, elevated institutionalized church leaders, extremely bright lighting, stain glass windows and the very fact that this is Bulworth's choice of venue. The raucous nature of the gathering seems to go beyond a pure "soulfulness" and more it seems to me to a commodified commercialism *à la* the Whoopi Goldberg enterprises *Sister Act* (Emile Ardolino, 1992) and *Sister Act II: Back in the Habit* (Bill Duke, 1993). Seeing these spaces from this perspective—*both* churches representing commodified and reified spaces (and Bulworth directly challenges the black parishioners' lack of engagement with the dominant order)—shifts the depiction from one that solely focuses on race, to one that focuses more on class disparities and commodification and reification.

Bulworth's next stop, the Beverly Hills fundraiser, further escalates this polarization of his growing anti-corporate status. This movement further juxtaposes rich and poor. In comparison to the black church (at least in terms of the "poor" space the church inhabits and the poverty of the patrons) we have affluence marked by the ornate structure of the house, the gold color of the mise-en-scène, the expensive cars, décor, dress, food, and the pretentious mannerisms of the rich and powerful. Like in the black church space, Bulworth's unsettling presence and "truths," and his false exterior, reveal and deconstruct the hegemonic corporate apparatus.

Bulworth expresses his distaste for their jobs ("crap"), their sin-

gle minded desire for money ("How much money do you guys really need?"), and their (corporate owned entertainment industry) union with politicians. Finally, the discomfort of the guests at the Beverly Hills function is also tangible because of Bulworth's uncouth behavior (eating like a pig, acting erratically, yelling across the room for more crab cheesecakes). The exaggerated behavior by Bulworth only enhances the pretentiousness and artificiality of the Beverly Hills group.

In another telling space, the Beverly Wilshire Fundraiser Brunch, we have the corporate heavies all lined up for Bulworth's ultimate castigation. Like the Beverly Hills function, all permeated with codings of wealth and pomposity, here too is a refined space of power and affluence. Instead of an emphasis on the décor and trappings of wealth, the political nature of the space stands out.

Into this space comes Bulworth's disruptive presence, exacerbated further by the presence of Nina and her two friends. Rapping, possibly the quintessential oppugnation of upper crust morality and corporate formality (and a political art form in its own right), and Bulworth's trademark by now, Bulworth launches into an attack on the corporate apparatus. Beginning with "Big Money, Big Money" his tirade covers some of the more egregious corporate elements in society: the insurance industry, oil, banking and credit, HMOs, and the healthcare industry. He also hints at some conspiratorial elements. He raps, "the Arabs got the oil, we buy everything they sell, but if the brothers raise the price we blow them all to hell," which is even more timely now! This conspiracy element is an underlying presence throughout the film. The "truths" that Bulworth reveals are kept undercover by the institutions of power (politics, corporations, the media), fostering a constant tension in everyday life that secrets are being kept. Thus, we have this ever-present atmosphere of conspiracy theories.

Bulworth's assassination, or attempted assassination, brings this idea of conspiracy prominently to the surface. Jameson says that the "conspiratorial text" may

be taken to constitute an unconscious, collective effort at trying to figure out where we are and what landscapes and forces confront us in a late twentieth century whose abominations are heightened by their concealment and their bureaucratic impersonality. Conspiracy film takes a wild stab at the heart of all that, in a situation in which it is the intent and the gesture that counts.[10]

In other words, it is a way to allegorically map the ubiquity of the collective totality of late capitalistic power, largely in the form of multinational corporations. In reference to Pakula's conspiratorial film *The Parallax View*, and I think relevant to this discussion, Jameson says that

Pakula's world here seems to me to move into a new and more generalized sensory space in which there are no longer any ontological hiding-places of that kind: the conspiracy wins, if it does (as in *The Parallax View*), not because it has some special form of "power" that the victims lack, but simply because it is collective and the victims, taken one by one in their isolation, are not.[11]

Beatty seems to be suggesting something quite similar here. When Bulworth begins to expose this sense of collectivity of the corporate and political powers, he clearly delineates the functionality of the corporate apparatus and the dysfunctionality of the disempowered (masses). It is only when he begins to reaffirm his own

sense of a past and potential present collectivity, through the anchoring signifiers of the pictures on his wall (which is further emphasized by dissolves and camera movements that intimately connect them), and through the social bonding (in the true sense of the word) and interaction of the people he encounters, that he and the masses can become truly empowered and a threat to the globalized, multinational corporate structure.

Moreover, as I conveyed above, Beatty makes a point of showing that while race considerations are important, more critical is not allowing class-consciousness to be elided. We see this throughout as Beatty compares rich and poor, but we see this element most concretely when Bulworth says as much during his "obscenities" speech: "Rich people have always stayed on top by dividing white people from colored people. White people got more in common with colored people than they do with rich people." Beatty's point here is a critical one: with the dissipation of class-consciousness, real oppositional possibilities to capitalism have been hampered. In terms of the specific race question that Beatty poses above, Derrick Bell echoes Beatty's frustration with whites' lack of discernment. Bell suggests that whites' "sense of entitlement vis-à-vis blacks" overrides their common disfranchised status with blacks against those with wealth and power.[12]

Further reinforcing this emphasis of class over race (and perhaps the film's ultimate "utopic" expression), Bulworth says that the best way to achieve racial integration is through "a voluntary, free spirited open ended program of procreative racial deconstruction. Everybody just gotta keep fucking everybody till they're all the same color." Again, this still highly inflammatory notion (at least, it seems, when it comes to the interracial mixing of blacks and whites; remember, Bulworth says "colored" people, not just black and white people) reasserts Bulworth's emphasis on the need to transcend race and reinstitute class as a galvanizing force. In the case of Bulworth himself, Beatty has him live what he preaches, as he begins a relationship with a black woman, Nina, though the casting of Halle Berry in the role of Nina calls into question the subversiveness of this relationship.

Also in this Beverly Wilshire Fundraiser Brunch space, Bulworth doesn't stop at suggesting conspiracy. In dynamic fashion, he even suggests we switch to socialism to deal with Healthcare, a taboo idea indeed. Again, Beatty gets this (radical) idea in by putting it in the mouth of pathologized Bulworth (and comedy in general). Whether this is overt enough to be considered radical is up for debate. For Jameson, only when this agenda is pushed forward "explicitly" can a text be considered radical. He says that "critiques of consumption and commodification can only be truly radical when they specifically include reflection, not merely on the problem of the market itself but, above all, on the nature of socialism as an alternative system."[13] While I tend to agree with this assertion, I also think that popular texts can do something more than, as Jameson goes on to say, "merely moralize." As I conveyed previously, popular texts can offer mass audiences at least a foothold on the serious social and political issues that confront them. A film like *Bulworth* may engage mass audiences in subject matter and issues that they may not otherwise be exposed to or even aware of. Further, a film like *Bulworth* can congeal latent disaffected energies, or "anxieties," and give them a voice.

In addition to these three key spaces, Bulworth's passage through other poor black spaces (Nina's home and neighborhood, the black nightclub, and L.D.'s "office") parallels his continuing evolution from the personification of corporate power to the allegorical embodiment of the (poor) people.

In the nightclub and Nina's home, Bulworth becomes part of the social and familial collectivity, while Bulworth's assistants Murphy and Bill Feldman (Joshua Malina) retain their corporate (alien) status. Nina's low income neighborhood registers the familiar images of deserted streets, tough looking kids on the corner, graffiti, mom and pop shops, closed down shops, garbage strewn about, helicopters flying overhead, and drug dealers. Despite the familiarity, the stereotypical images retain their power mostly because of the contrasting corporate (rich) spaces and how these didactic spaces reaffirm the emphasis on class.

In L.D.'s "office" Bulworth witnesses the effect that a corporate controlled system has on the lower class. Bulworth learns this lesson not only by what he sees but also by what he hears. L.D. gives his speech here, which, like Nina's, Bulworth will use in his "obscenities" speech. We see the corporate (dehumanizing) influence in how L.D. runs his business like a corporation. He calls it "the substance supply industry," and says things like "I'm giving them [kids] entry level positions into the only growth sector occupation that's truly open to them now." Further, the explicit messages in this sequence are clear: the illegal drug "business" is a direct reflection of the "legal" corporation. Being a product of a capitalistic system, both entities put profit before people. Moreover, the class dichotomy comes to the fore again: the rich and well off versus the detritus that naturally accumulates in a capitalistic system. Accentuating this scene even more is the "home" space that L.D. occupies. In a sort of twisted parallel, or a "return of the repressed," the "American Dream" (played out in Bulworth's canned ad – perfect family, dog, white picket fence) becomes the "real," played out here in the image of the apparently parentless kids that L.D. employs (seen playing violent video games and rapping with each other) and L.D.'s substitute patriarchal role.

The final allegorical element I want to discuss is the two villains of the film, Vinnie and Crockett. Bulworth has hired Vinnie to assassinate him. Bulworth has made a deal with Crockett, the insurance man, to ensure that his daughter gets a sizable chunk of money after his death. We see them enter the picture one after the other, the slovenly Vinnie being set off against the more smooth and clean cut Crocket.

This postmodernistic reconfiguration of "evil" and villainy is revealing. The assassin figure, typically dangerous and threatening, has now become simply unsavory. He in effect lacks credibility as a villain. In particular his marked consumption of food puts him nearer to death and inefficaciousness (even before his heart attack) than to an intimidating presence. In striking contrast to slovenly Vinnie is the real threat, the corporate representative, Crockett.

Crockett is drawn pretty predictably. His token gestures of courtesy, his snake oil sales pitch and smile, his dress, his physiognomy, all signify his unsavory position as a representative not only for the insurance company that he works for but also as a figurative, allegorical stand in for the global corporate entity, the real villain in the film. Jameson points out in his essay "Class and Allegory in Contemporary Mass Culture: *Dog Day Afternoon* as a Political Film" that a character can be a stand in for the omniscient villainous corporate entity. In this essay he focuses on the FBI agent: "The FBI agent…comes to occupy the place of that immense and decentralized power network which marks the present multinational stage of monopoly capitalism."[14] His version of this stand, unlike Crockett, is devoid of personality and noteworthy features. He says that "the very absence in his features becomes a sign and an expression of the presence/absence of corporate power in our daily lives, all-shaping and omnipotent and yet rarely accessible in figurable terms, that is to say, in the representable form of individual actors or agents"[15] While Crockett does not quite fit this description, his persona is nonetheless generic enough to suggest

this type of figurability, though in a different guise. Crockett takes on the secondary attributes of this allegorical representation, the corrupt, slick corporate elite figure.

The textual context has him as a larger representation and not, as in other films, simply a pawn of the corporate entity. Furthermore, to represent the egregious nature of the global corporate network, this type of surrogate is necessary to offer a tangible, corporeal villainous entity. The last shot of him on what looks like a rooftop is particularly noteworthy. The camera takes a low level angle on him high up, behind a barbed wire pole, in the shadows, very unlike his other more overbearing presences in previous shots. We don't see him fire the shots, which further allegorizes him. That is, Crockett doesn't shoot Bulworth; the higher anonymous, omnipresent, destructive power of the global, multinational corporations shoots (shuts up) Bulworth.

Another curious moment reinforces this reading. During Bulworth's "obscenities" speech, someone is above him trying to kill him. However, all of the characters are accounted for. Here again we have an anonymous power trying to shut Bulworth up and another allegorical figuration of the multinational corporate entity that Bulworth has laid siege to.

Moving to the other two components that I began this essay with—the political didactic and the surfacing of "utopian impulses" and "anxieties"—I want to look at two other important moments in the film.

The two "unrealistic" moments come when Bulworth wanders the streets of Nina's neighborhood looking for her. While looking for Nina he first encounters some very young black kids trying to sell him drugs. Then, a little later, two white police officers racially profile the same kids. When Bulworth encounters the kids, they seem like your stereotypical threatening drug dealers, despite the fact that most of them are pre-pubescent. They threaten him, but what does Bulworth do? He offers to buy them ice cream! Dan Georgakas sagaciously says of this curious scene, "Almost as a joke, the terrified Bulworth offers to buy them ice cream! A jump cut then shows the kids walking out of an ice-cream parlor licking cones. Beatty is trying desperately to remind us that, in fact, these are children. Behind their hostile leers are human beings as vulnerable as his Bulworth."[16]

The next sequence similarly offers us a highly didactic and "unrealistic" encounter. Two police officers see the kids eating the ice cream. Suspicious of where they got the money to buy the ice cream, they stop and question the kids. One of the officers even rams a (white) ice cream cone into one of the kid's face. Bulworth then pulls a Bruce Willis and throws one of the police officers over the car!

Not only are these sequences good examples of a necessary political didactic, they are also good examples of how a film can raise "utopian impulses" and "anxieties." Along with these wish-fulfilling moments, we have already seen this component at work. Beatty consciously offers us an unfiltered view of the world, giving our "anxieties" a touchstone, while at the same time offering us utopic possibilities, especially in the example of a politician who, with the aide of the people, rises up against not only corporate corruption and oppression but local inequities as well.

The question is, are these "utopian impulses" and "anxieties" re-contained at the end or not, a critical factor in deciding whether the film is a viable oppositional film. I would argue that these "utopian impulses" and "anxieties" are not re-contained. Though Bulworth is back in his suit and his pathological state seems to be resolved (apparently he has been asleep for two days or more), he symbolically re-institutes his anti-corporate image by asking Nina to face the press with him. Moreover, Bulworth is shot. Though it is uncertain whether he is killed or not – the last shot is of

Rastaman by a hospital saying "hold on Bulworth," perhaps suggesting that he is clinging to life – the very fact that he is shot suggests that his bold indictment of the globalized, multinational corporate apparatus is doomed to failure, as this entity will quiet him one way or another.

Finally, in the last shot of the film, Rastaman speaks directly into the camera, saying what he has said to Bulworth throughout, "you can't be no ghost, be a spirit!" This time, though, he is not directing his words at Bulworth, but to us. He challenges us to act on what we have seen and heard, to not be an empty, aimless "ghost" but to be a "spirit," to be plugged into the operations of the world and engage the serious social and political issues that impact our lives. There can be no better example of the political didactic than this.

All three of these elements have the effect of not foreclosing anything that has come before. Bulworth does not renege on his preceding actions despite going back to "normal." And by ending the film on a non-utopic moment, Bulworth's assassination attempt, and by the self-reflexive direct address, the film forces us to address what we have just viewed.

Beatty's text is invaluable for raising so many issues that go largely undiscussed in society. Beatty's film counters the enormous pedagogical influences that bombard us everyday. Antonio Gramsci suggested that a dominant ideological order maintained power more effectively through cultural texts and institutions than through coercive means. Whether inadvertently or purposely, cultural texts and institutions reinforce the dominant social order daily through their pedagogical content, acting not merely on a political, social, and economic level, but also on a psychological level, conditioning us to see the status quo as "normal." That is why it is critical we do not disregard popular cinema, for those few popular films that challenge the status quo, whatever their limitations might be, are a critical step in injecting new frames of reference for mass audiences, to perhaps begin (or continue) the process of seeing through the hegemonic surface to the underlying, smouldering "real."

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Bridges

NOTRE MUSIQUE
BY JEAN-LUC GODARD

BY PETER HARCOURT

Each September, the Toronto International Film Festival grants discerning spectators a chance to experience wonderful films from all over the world, many of which may never appear again. Forget all the hype, the red carpet, the paparazzi; think of the chance of seeing the latest film by Abbas Kiarostami, Pedro Almodòvar, or Hou Hsiao-hsien. So quiet and so subtle, Hou's *Café Lumière* will probably never surface in even the most specialized theatres of North America. A film that will gain, however, at least a limited exhibition is the one I wish to present in this account— *Notre Musique*, by Jean-Luc Godard.

In Purgatory, the central section of *Notre Musique*(2004) by Jean-Luc Godard, there is a sequence that concerns the reconstruction of the single span, stone arch bridge in Mostar, a medieval town south-west of Sarajevo in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Spanning the Neretva River, the bridge was built by the Ottoman Turks in 1566 of 456 blocks of stone, hundreds of which fell into the river when the bridge was destroyed in 1993 during the Croat-Muslim war. Although Hungarians initially salvaged the stones from the river, the reconstruction was initially supervised by a French architect, Gilles Pequeux, (spelled Pecqueux in the film's credits, the correct spelling is without the "c") "not to restore the past, "he explains, "but to make the future possible." He is talking to Olga Brodsky/Nade Dieu, a young Israeli Jew of Russian origin who is tormented by the irresolvable tensions between Israel and Palestine and who, like Judith Lerner/Sarah Adler, another Israeli Jew, has come to Sarajevo to visit a country "in which reconciliation seems possible."

This sequence brings together three elements that inform the film. First there is the international, multi-cultural mix. Along with professional actors, the film contains the actual presence of Pequeux, the architect; of Pierre Bergounioux, a French writer; of Juan Goytisolo, a Spaniard who recites his poems (without subtitles) while squatting amongst some ruins; and of Mahmoud Darwich, a Palestinian writer who is interviewed by Judith. They have all come to Sarajevo for the annual European Literary Encounters and, of course among them, interacting with them, is Jean-Luc Godard.

Secondly, this sequence also establishes the two young women, Olga and Judith, who bear a strong resemblance to one another—the one moving towards darkness (as the press hand-out explains), the other towards light. Both want to understand these ethnic conflicts. Although Olga falls more and more deeply into despair when she thinks about the Palestinian/Israeli situation, Judith finds hope in the reconstruction of the bridge, taking pictures with her digital camera as if to capture at least traces of this once conflicted country in the effort to understand its relevance to her own.

Finally, there is the bridge itself. Rebuilt from fragments retrieved from the past, being meticulously reconstructed by numbering all the shattered stones in order to re-assemble them in order, "like learning a new language," as Pequeux explains, this process of reconstruction is what Godard has been doing with cinema all his life. He has constantly been building bridges—between the old and the new, between documentary and fiction, between film and video, between the real and the imaginary.

There is also a psychological bridge between the young women, as if they are separate parts of the same endeavour, the recto/verso of the same pain. Olga is more committed to the real, Judith to the imaginary. Olga's despair at the situation with Palestine leads her to contemplate suicide, preferably in some self-sacrificial way. Echoing the existential ultimatum put forward by Albert Camus in the 1940s, she explains to her Uncle Ramos/Rony Kramer, himself an Israeli Jew living in France, that "that will be total liberty, when it's the same to live or die. That's my goal," she explains. "*Drôle de but!*" he replies.

Judith, on the other hand, can transform reality through her imagination. While taking photographs at the Mostar bridge, she sees the trio of North American Indians that appears in this film, always *ex machina*. First she sees them clambering into their pick-up, as Native people are assumed to do; then she sees them posing in full ceremonial regalia, as she imagines them to be. Finally, the links between these two woman is turned topsy-turvy through a characteristically Godardian inversion: although we see Judith taking pictures, Olga offers Godard a video/DVD at the end.

To view any film by Jean-Luc Godard is to participate in paradox. Through paradox, his films become a cinema of thought. Characters may pontificate, mouthing statements—frequently quotations—that are not necessarily profound. But the collision of these statements oblige us to think about them in the effort to make connec-

Notre Musique

tions—to build conceptual bridges.

Godard's films have always been full of the rhetoric of other people and the rhetorical mode increasingly employed is apostrophe. Characters speak less to one another than to the space of the film. And because in this film most of the speakers are portly, middle-class, middle-aged men, perhaps it doesn't matter who, in fact, is speaking. "Light is the first visible animal of the invisible," the Spanish novelist and poet Juan Goytisolo declaims, to no one in particular. In his interview with Judith, the Palestinian Mahmoud Darwich explains that the Palestinians are famous only because they have Israel as their enemy. "There is greater inspiration and human richness in defeat," he continues, "than in victory." "The trust in the world that terror destroys," says someone else, "is irretrievable." And at one time someone proclaims (is it Olga?): "We are all guilty for everything and everybody, myself more than others."

These apothegms are the numbered stones with which Godard reconstructs in this film his melancholy threnody. The narrative centre—if there is a narrative centre—occurs during Godard's lecture on Text and Image. Using an example from Hawks's *His Girl Friday* (1940), Godard proffers the shot/reverse shot as the essence of film grammar. But the lecture moves in a more dialectical direction towards the philosophical essence of Godard's latest films, his own spin on the shot/reverse shot: Elsinor Castle isn't much in itself but is transformed when we see it as Hamlet's castle. Elsinor is the reality; Hamlet the imagination. Imagination, he insists, leads to certitude; reality to incertitude. Shot/reverse shot. That is our music, Godard apodictically declares. Listening to him while looking at the clos-

ing intertitles of Dreyer's *La Passion de Jeanne d'arc* (1928), Olga is now able to imagine her own martyrdom.

Along with beautiful shots of cars and trams, one running alongside a canal, Purgatory is framed by shots at an airport. In an elevated long-shot, we see people arriving and then departing. Most prominent in the image is a huge yellow question mark, obviously intended for the passengers but also for the audience. Not only does the colour reinforce the yellow pillars of the street market, shots of which serve as punctuation throughout this section of the film; not only is the repeated colour reminiscent of the poster colours of Godard's early films, but the question mark suggests that we must go on questioning, not only what we have seen but also the values of the world in which we live.

This 60 minutes of Purgatory is itself framed by 10 minutes of Hell and 10 minutes of Heaven. Hell consists of shots of violence, of war and destruction, involving both newsreel and fictional footage, suggesting not just the violence of battles but also of human nature. At the opening a female voice explains: "And so, in the age of fable, after floods and downpours, there appeared on earth men armed for extermination." And as the images continue, she declares: "It's amazing that anyone survived."

Heaven, on the other hand, is a bucolic retreat of babbling brooks and verdant trees, sealed off by a chain-link fence, guarded, as their imperialist hymn prophesied almost 100 years ago, by United States Marines! The Hymn concludes: "If the Army and the Navy/Ever look on Heaven's scenes/They will find the streets are guarded/By United States Marines."

Olga walks about these peaceful spaces, wordlessly, having her wrist stamped by an imaginary stamp, passing

by a group of young people playing with an imaginary ball. She encounters a young man sitting by a tree with whom she shares an apple. She then stands up and, in full close-up, first with her eyes closed and then with them open, looks out at us. A female voice concludes: "It was a fine clear day. You could see a long way off, but not as far as Olga had gone." Without further explanation, the film is over.

For aficionados of the films of Jean-Luc Godard, *Notre Musique* is in many ways a simple film—perhaps a didactic film. It is certainly an accessible film. Containing echoes of material we have seen before, there is a relaxed pace to *Notre Musique*, informed, however, with a deep concern for the violence of the world. Only poetry, the film implies, might help us survive.

And I haven't mentioned the music—the alternation of harshly percussive piano sounds followed by far gentler moments that accompany the scenes of Hell; or the lush orchestral sounds (is it Sibelius?) that introduce us to Heaven. Furthermore, the film arrests us at moments with images that detach themselves from the narrative to become works of visual art in their own right—the Indian woman's feet in sandals, descending some stairs; Olga running through the streets in her red-&-white striped jersey; a plane taking off from Sarajevo, being swallowed by mist.

Like Voltaire's Candide, at the end of Purgatory Godard is in his garden tending to things that grow, to that part of life he can control. The reds of the flowers re-inforce the red scarf he had previously worn but also the red shoulder bag that Olga carried into a theatre in Jerusalem where, assuming it contained a bomb, marksmen shot her dead.

Not mentioning the early shorts, the contributions to episodic films, the television films, the video shorts, his commissioned works and the extraordinary *Histoire(s) du cinéma* (1989–98), now in his 74th year, Jean-Luc Godard, has made at least 35 theatrical features. Like the Westerns of John Ford and the domestic dramas of Yazujiro Ozu, Godard's complete works, viewed over time, convey the sense of a man maturing. They have taken us from the romantic playfulness of the early work, through an aggressively troubled political phase, to the often still playful but more meditative recent period, with films that are increasingly anxious about both cinema and the world. While still indulging in irony and paradox, they address the truly frightening realities of our time—the realities that constitute "our music" in this film.

Notre Musique

Hou Hsiao-hsien's *Café Lumière*

BY FLORENCE JACOBOWITZ

Hou Hsiao-hsien's latest film *Café Lumière* (*Kohi Jikou*) is a commemorative project produced as an homage to Yasujiro Ozu, commissioned by Shochiko, the company for whom Ozu worked. Ozu has been cited as an influence in Hou's films, in part because of the directors' shared attention to humanist concerns—for example, the struggles of day-to-day experience, coping in a modern world which demands a rethinking of social relationships. Many have noted the elements of style evident in both directors' work: the careful framing and composition, the slow-paced meditative quality of the films. Both invite a more active form of spectatorship. The plot does not drive the drama; instead the films are more understated and narrative meaning is often communicated through detail and visual patterns. It is difficult to present a close stylistic analysis of *Café Lumière* based on one press screening; it seemed that the camera was less restrained than it is in Ozu's late films and perhaps the sense of movement was intensified by the repeated shots of moving trains and trams that permeate the film and underline the theme of contemplating new directions. At times the camera seemed to be positioned lower than the norm but not as consistently as the pillow shots Ozu became known for. It is, perhaps, less important to compare the film to Ozu's in terms of style than it is to think of *Café Lumière* as a tribute to the spirit of his work. The press release describes the film as a *Tokyo Story* for the 21st C and this should not be taken too literally. *Tokyo Story* is much darker in tone. The failure of children to fulfill parental expectations, the valuation of success in monetary terms, the diminished interest in the elderly who can no longer be productive or self-sufficient, all contribute to Kyoko's comment near the end of the film, "Isn't life disappointing?" confirmed by Noriko's response, "Yes, it is". Noriko is the film's humanist voice-her kindness and generosity are in themselves a form of resistance to the values embedded in capitalist life and male-dominant codes of family, marriage and kinship. She is respectful of tradition but represents the impulse for freedom and independence. In this sense Yoko/Yo

Hitoto is a contemporary version of the young independent woman thinking about her place in the world, a Noriko for the 21st C. She is a modern interpretation of how Robin Wood defines the Noriko persona as embodied by Setsuko Hara: a woman resisting the social pressures and expectations of a woman's role in marriage and family life.[1] Yo Hitoto is a young pop singer in Japan and Yoko is her first screen performance; she clearly doesn't match the expressive range of a star of Setsuko Hara's stature, but the idea of trying to forge an identity that will be authentic to one's needs and sensibilities is the same.

Café Lumière begins with a shot of a train crossing the screen, followed by a credit shot and then a scene of Yoko, hanging laundry outside of the window of her small apartment (an opening reference to two recurrent visual motifs used by Ozu, trains and laundry) while speaking to a friend on the phone of her recent trip to Taiwan. The plot of the film is relatively minimalist. Yoko is presently researching the life of a jazz musician, Jiang Wen-Ye, who lived in Japan in the 30s and 40s. She interviews people who knew him, and searches with her friend Hajime/Tadanobu Asano for the café he frequented. Hajime works at a bookstore but is also a sound artist collecting natural sounds of trains and train stations for an art project. Yoko is frequently seen sitting in a café or a tempura bar where a friend works—places where she works or thinks or relaxes and seems to feel comfortable. She is also often shot riding trains or waiting for them or napping on a train or feeling unwell or meeting her friend at a particular station. The predominance of these shots—the repeated visual and aural elements of trains and cafés suggests that these public urban spaces have become alternatives to, or at least extensions of, the private home. Yoko seems perfectly 'at home' outside of the tiny apartment where she lives. Her search for the café of the 30s frequented by the jazz musician may be important to her because the idea of the artist at work in the city is an idea with which she identifies. Cafés are not defined by gender roles. They are places where people converse, writers write, musicians compose- in other words they represent independence and creativity. Yoko is looking for this kind of place in opposition to the traditional place at home with a family, which may account for the film's title.

As the narrative progresses one learns that Yoko is pregnant. She orders milk instead of coffee in the cafés she frequents and she announces her pregnancy non-

chalantly to her stepmother and father on a visit home, leaving them looking stunned and speechless. The long take of Yoko mentioning this between mouthfuls, leaving her parents looking uncomfortable accentuates the gap in attitudes between them. She also later tells her friend Hajime of her pregnancy; in part because she is experiencing physical changes and sometimes feels unwell because of them. Her matter-of-factness when announcing her pregnancy to her family or friend is in itself an expression of her independence - her means of maintaining control over her identity; she will not allow it to direct her life. She informs her parents that she has no intention of marrying the father who was a student of hers in Taiwan. She describes him as working for his family and being too close to his mother, choosing characteristics that traditionally would be considered exemplary, that for her define his lack of independence. (His insignificance is underlined by the fact that he is never seen- like Noriko's husband in *Late Spring*.) Although the narrative does not offer Hajime as a romantic substitute, Yoko seems very comfortable and at ease with him. Their affection is expressed through mutual concern, generosity and shared interests. Yoko brings Hajime a gift of a pocket watch from Taiwan, surprises him with an order of coffee from a local café, calls him on the phone, has him accompany her on her treks through the city. Hajime shows her his train art project, and visits her at her apartment when he is worried about how she is feeling. Both seem careful to safeguard the delicacy of a relationship that is not defined by a traditional idea of romance and the couple. The serenity and trust they share is expressed in other ways; for example, Yoko tells him of her dream about ogres and frozen babies—the expression of her subliminal concerns about becoming a mother and having a child. Hajime listens, demystifies and soothes her anxieties by finding the source of her dream narrative in the plot of a children's book by Maurice Sendak entitled *Outside Over There*. It is the story of a young girl, Ida, entrusted with the care of her baby sister in her parents' absence. Ida, busy playing her music, fails to watch her sister and goblins come and steal her to take her for a goblin bride. They replace the baby with a changeling, a frozen representation made of ice, which stares and drips away. Ida must go 'outside over there' to find and reclaim her sister. Ida finds the goblins in the midst of the wedding but the goblins are only babies themselves. She

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charms them with her music (and exhausts them), rescues her sister and is again entrusted with her care. The film places much emphasis on the book and the story, and has Yoko reading sections of the narrative aloud when Hajime gives it to her. The story is, in many ways, her own-being entrusted with the care of a baby, saving a girl from marriage, wanting to express herself with her creative interests.

Yoko and Hajime are tentatively staking out new paths beyond the traditions of the home and venturing 'outside over there'. The film subtly illustrates Yoko's need to separate and claim her own voice, for example, in scenes with her father and stepmother. The tone of these scenes is gentle, almost playful, with a humorous undertone that avoids judgment. When Yoko visits her family, much of the emphasis centres at the table where meals are served. It is through food at the table that domestic roles are played out—the wife serves her husband and her skill manifests itself in her ability to cook well. Her commitment to the home is evident in the careful preparation of dishes that take time and effort. Careful not to overstep boundaries, Yoko's stepmother expresses her concern for Yoko by listening, delicately asking a question or two, and serving her a warm tasty meal, which she enjoys. This scene is contrasted with the one where Yoko's stepmother and father

visit her at her apartment in Tokyo. Yoko has no food in her apartment and so they order takeout and her stepmother, perhaps anticipating this, brings along food that she has prepared at home which she knows her husband will like. Yoko speaks of her decision not to marry and her father's silence and discomfort is evident, but so is his concern and love for his daughter, expressed in the gesture he makes of offering her a piece of food from his plate he knows she especially likes. Yoko ends up going over to a neighbour's house to borrow sake (as well as the glasses and decanter in which to serve it) and brings along her stepmother, much to her humiliation ("I'm so ashamed.") The need for the child to proclaim her/his individuality is a familiar rite of passage and Yoko is indirectly announcing this in her rejection of domestic expectations. The sake-borrowing scene is yet another allusion to *Tokyo Story* (Noriko also borrows sake when her in-laws visit) but it is also very different; Noriko is not defining herself through this gesture. She is being generous beyond her means and her act contrasts starkly with the indifference of the couple's children. The tone in *Café Lumière* is much lighter; watching the stepmother, in long shot, hurrying back to Yoko's apartment completely humiliated as Yoko saunters along unperturbed is humorous and speaks eloquently of the film's thematic,

of the way change affects daily life and the ideological implications of the smallest ritual. As different as it is, Yoko is building upon the foundation set by Noriko/ Setsuko Hara in Ozu's films. Yoko's character, reinforced by the casting of a rising pop star, is not about domesticity and maintaining the status quo; she speaks for her own voice and lives in a vibrant city which can afford her the possibility of pursuing what she wants. The film ends with a remarkable shot of trains moving across the screen in various directions, in and out of tunnels, as Yoko and Hajime look on, creating a sense of energy and dynamism and possibility.

Self-proclaimed critics on the net as well as some newspaper reviewers are respectful of the film but also speak of it as lightweight Hou- lacking the cool edginess of the alienated youth of *Millennium Mambo*, or the mesmerizing oneiric ethos of *Flowers of Shanghai* or the seriousness of the socio/historical dramas set in Taiwan. *Café Lumière* is deceptively unglamorous- a subtle film about a woman contemplating her place in the world which will appeal to the spectator open to its particular grace and contemplative spirit.

1 Wood, Robin "Resistance to Definition: Ozu's Noriko Trilogy", Chapter 5, *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film Hollywood and Beyond*, Columbia University Press, 1998,USA

The Ninth Day and The Downfall

BY SUSAN MORRISON

"..(W)e Germans just can't hide behind the taboo any longer that these horrors are not depictable. Sooner or later, one has to face them."
—Volker Schlondorff, press kit

"We have to come to terms with our own history."
—Oliver Hirschbiegel, press conference

Almost sixty years have passed since the fall of Hitler's Third Reich and the end of the Second World War. Recently, there have been a number of films that have confronted the incomprehensible brutality of the Nazis in their drive to power: *The Pianist*, *The Grey Zone*, *Schindler's List* etc. What connects these films is their concern with the Holocaust, the deliberate attempt by the Nazis to rid the world of Jews.

This year's Toronto International Film Festival brought us not one but two films, both from Germany, which, each in its own way, deal unflinchingly with this shameful moment in German history: Volker Schlondorff's *The Ninth Day*, and

Oliver Hirschbiegel's *The Downfall*. Interestingly enough, however, neither film is about the 'final solution'. Both are concerned with the impact of Nazi ideology and power on ordinary *volk*, yet neither shuns the task of clearly and emphatically condemning the actions of the Nazis (and those who collaborated with them).

Of the two films, Volker Schlondorff 's is the more 'conventional' in its presentation of the subject. Based on an autobiography, *The Ninth Day* tells the story of Henri Kremer, a Catholic priest from Luxembourg, who, at the film's beginning, is (already) incarcerated in Dachau for opposing the Nazis' race laws. Kremer is a witness to and recipient of the unspeakable horrors and hardships of daily life at Dachau . Along with him in the camp are many other clergymen similarly imprisoned for refusing to go along with Nazi policies. Their religious vocation gives the clergymen no protection from the taunts and jibes of the camp guards and camp commandant, who take pleasure in mocking and torturing the prisoners.

Kremer is dragged into the commandant's quarters one day and informed that he has been reprieved and will be immediately sent home. His priestly clothes—black hat, black robes—are returned to him and he leaves Dachau for Luxembourg. As Kremer walks through the once-familiar streets, dazed by the reentry into apparent normalcy and freedom, he is followed and accosted by *untersturmfuhrer* Gebhardt, who orders him to show up at Gestapo

headquarters the next day. There, Gebhardt, a young German officer who has risen quickly in the ranks, informs Kremer that in fact, he has not been reprieved; there was a misunderstanding. He has merely been granted a leave of nine days, at the end of which he must return to Dachau. However, he may win a reprieve if he can convince the Bishop of Luxembourg, a former mentor of Kremer's, to cease his resistance to the Nazis. Gebhardt warns Kremer that,if he tries to flee to safety, all 18 of the clergy from Luxembourg incarcerated with him at Dachau will be put to death, as will his remaining family members. Kremer has been at Dachau and knows what awaits him if he returns. Over the course of the remaining days of freedom, he struggles with his conscience to choose the right path to follow, a path problematized not only by his own moral conscience in the face of Nazi evil, but also by the Bishop's refusal to see him at first and then, once he has gained an audience, by the Bishop's refusal to relent. Gebhardt, himself a lapsed seminarian, can't understand why Kremer doesn't support the Nazi cause. He tries to convince him through philosophical and psychological argument, cajoling and menacing in turn. Threatened with demotion if he fails to extract Kremer's compliance ,Gebhardt changes the rules and tells Kremer that all he has to do is write a letter publicly supporting the Nazi position regarding the Catholic Church.

The role of Kremer is played by
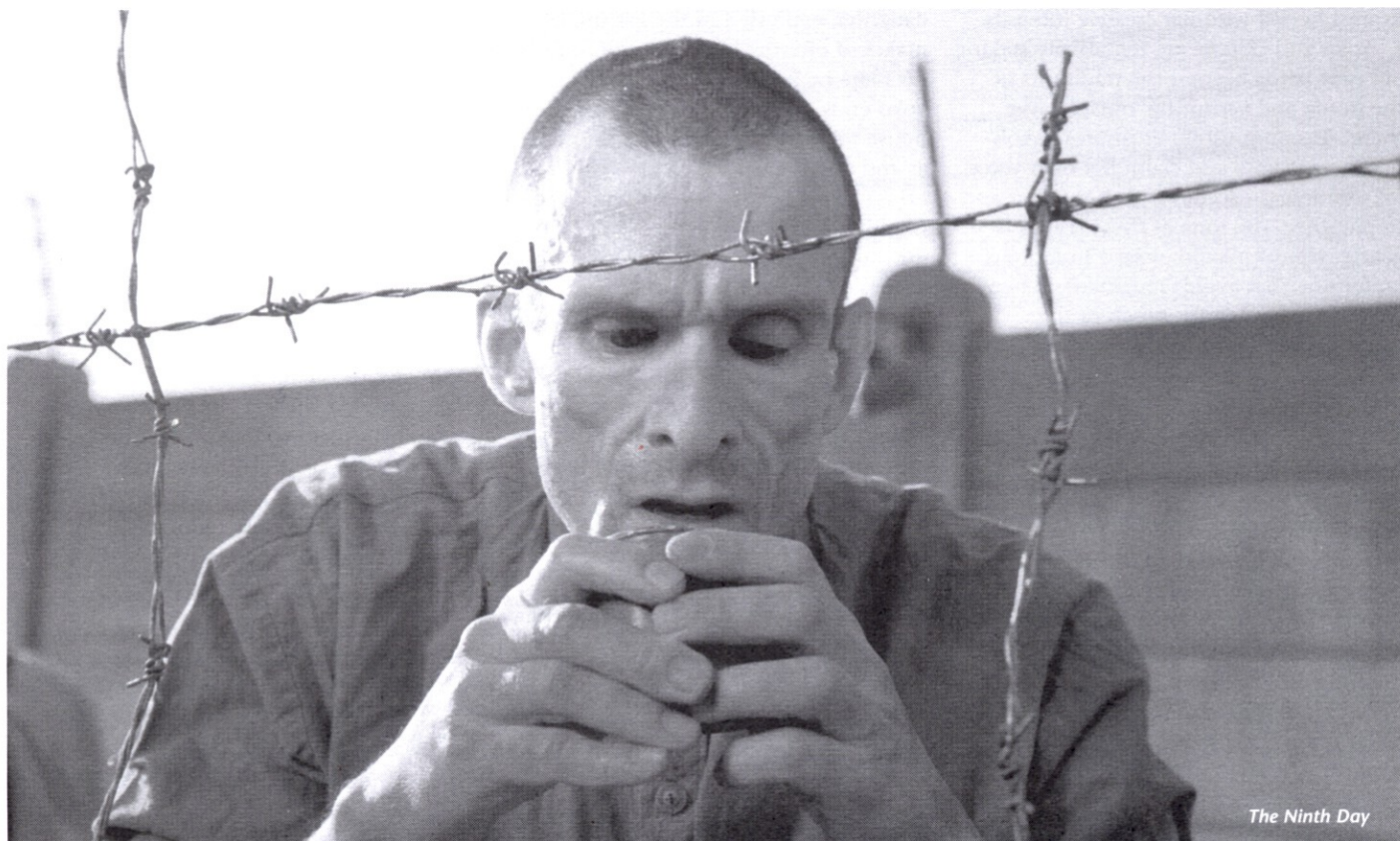
The Ninth Day

German actor Ulrich Mattes[1], whose deep sunken eyes and taut skin pulled back to barely cover his cheek bones uncannily evokes the emaciated appearance of a concentration camp victim. Schlondorff wisely allows the actor's face to carry much of the dramatic weight of the film. In a quasi-Bressonian manner, the director relies on shots of reaction more than action or even dialogue to get us inside Kremer's head. Kremer's moral double bind becomes ours through identification. Unlike *The Downfall*, whose ending we already know, the outcome of *The Ninth Day* is in question...not perhaps, as to which choice Kremer will ultimately make, but to the consequences of that choice.

Oliver Hirschbiegel's *The Downfall* takes as its subject the last 12 days of Hitler's life and power. It meshes a number of historical sources, primarily a recent book by Joachim Fest *Inside Hitler's Bunker* and *Until the Final Hour* by Traudl Junge, written in 1947 by Hitler's 'last' secretary, who gave an eyewitness account of the activities in the bunker in Berlin. This long film (150 minutes) however, surpasses its historical underpinnings by taking on the power of a fiction film while remaining true to its documentary-like affect. This is precisely because the characters whom we all know so well...Hitler, Himmler, Goebels, Goering, Eva Braun, even Speer...are emphatically not presented as caricatures. They are human, all too human in a novel approach to the usual trope of one dimensional Nazis. The important thing here is not that this enables us to understand *why* they did what they did. On the contrary, because they *were* human it makes their actions all that more reprehensible. To label them 'evil monsters', to portray them as cartoon stereotypes, is to push aside any recognition that humans have the capacity to inflict suffering and pain on each other and to renounce responsibility for permitting this to happen.

The power of this approach becomes more vivid when factored onto a German audience.

The film's writer/producer,Bernd Eichinger, commented during the TIFF press conference that his parents' generation, i.e. those Germans who were active participants in the Third Reich, are dying off, and it is his generation that is now the same age as those who committed the acts portrayed in the film. *The Downfall*, he said, was written for the next generation which will have to come to terms with Hitler's legacy for themselves. He went on to note that the power of a feature film is that it takes events from the past and

makes them present like no other medium can. Thus, the audience member, by being placed in the same situation as their forbears, is confronted with the question: What would I have done? Present also at the press conference was the film's director, Oliver Hirshbiegel, who added that the intention was not to get rid of 'German guilt'...no one in Germany questions that. The question rather, is, how to deal with it?

The Downfall presents a graphically realistic view of the fall of Berlin to the Russians and the last days of Hitler and his henchmen as they wait out the onslaught in the bunkers built under the city ..bunkers surprisingly large enough to contain well-appointed apartments, offices, dining room and dance hall. However, the viewer is never allowed to forget the imminent arrival of the dreaded Soviet army; the action takes place under a constant barrage of exploding bombs and erratic gunfire. Rooms shake, furniture rattles, and lights flicker on and off while the Nazis try to continue their daily activities underground. We the audience are sutured into the film through the device of using Traudl Junge as our go-between. A somewhat naïve young woman who at the film's beginning applies for the job of Hitler's secretary, she enables us to gain access to Hitler's inner circle in order to witness the downfall promised by the film's title. There are three other characters who also serve as lynchpins of the narrative. One is a Nazi officer -a doctor- whose loyalty to the Nazi ideology is unquestioned, but who becomes a sympathetic figure when he places immediate humane needs over military actions. A second is Albert Speer, architect to Hitler's grandiose fantasies for his Third Reich, who cautiously distances himself from Hitler as he sees the end approach. Last is a young boy, a member of the Hitler youth drafted willingly into active combat of the last days against his father's wishes ...this last most probably a stand-in for the author Joachim Fest who recounts how his father was strongly opposed to his joining the Hitler youth. One of the peculiar features of this film is that the conventional identificatory relationship between viewer and diegetic character is problematized by the omnipresent awareness of just what it was that this person (and these people did). The brilliance of the film is not only that it holds our interest as narrative drama even though we already know the ending, but that it foregrounds the complexity of the people involved. It is this

realism, even more than the authenticity of the warfare, that gives *The Downfall* its strength.

1 In an ironic move made more potent by the proximity of the film screenings at TIFF, Ulrich Mattes went from Nazi victim as Kremer in *The Ninth Day* to Nazi oppressor as Goebels in *The Downfall*. It is a sign of the skill of the actor that he managed the shift seamlessly, however shocking it may be for the viewer of both films.
2 Hitler is played by Bruno Ganz who seems to be channeling the *fuhrer* in an uncanny resemblance that absolutely convinces the viewer that he is Hitler. I am not a naïve film goer; however, when Ganz entered the room where the press conference was being held, it was at first difficult to separate the man from the role, he had so invaded the role in the film.

Living and Looking at Life

BRUCE WEBBER INTERVIEWED

BY RICHARD LIPPE
A Letter to True takes the form of a letter Bruce Webber writes to one of his five golden retriever dogs, a pup named True. Webber begins his voice over narration of the film by telling the viewer the letter was prompted by his loneliness while travelling on assignment. The letter is a means to connect to his animals and say how much he loves and misses them. Webber explains also that his need to acknowledge these feelings has been intensified since September 11, 2001, the event making him more keenly aware of the fragility of daily life and human existence itself.

A Letter to True is very much a love letter from an animal owner to the object(s) of his affection and it features numerous shots of Webber's beautiful dogs playing and enjoying themselves. However, the film functions simultaneously as a meditation on both the transience of human life and its complexity—the notion that living is about pleasure and loss, humanity and inhumanity, memory and the present day. In Webber's schema, his dogs represent a kind of innocence in their loyalty and love. But the film also indicates through various sources, including extracts from *Courage of Lassie* (1946) an immediate post-war film featuring a young Elizabeth Taylor [the actress is also a dog lover], that
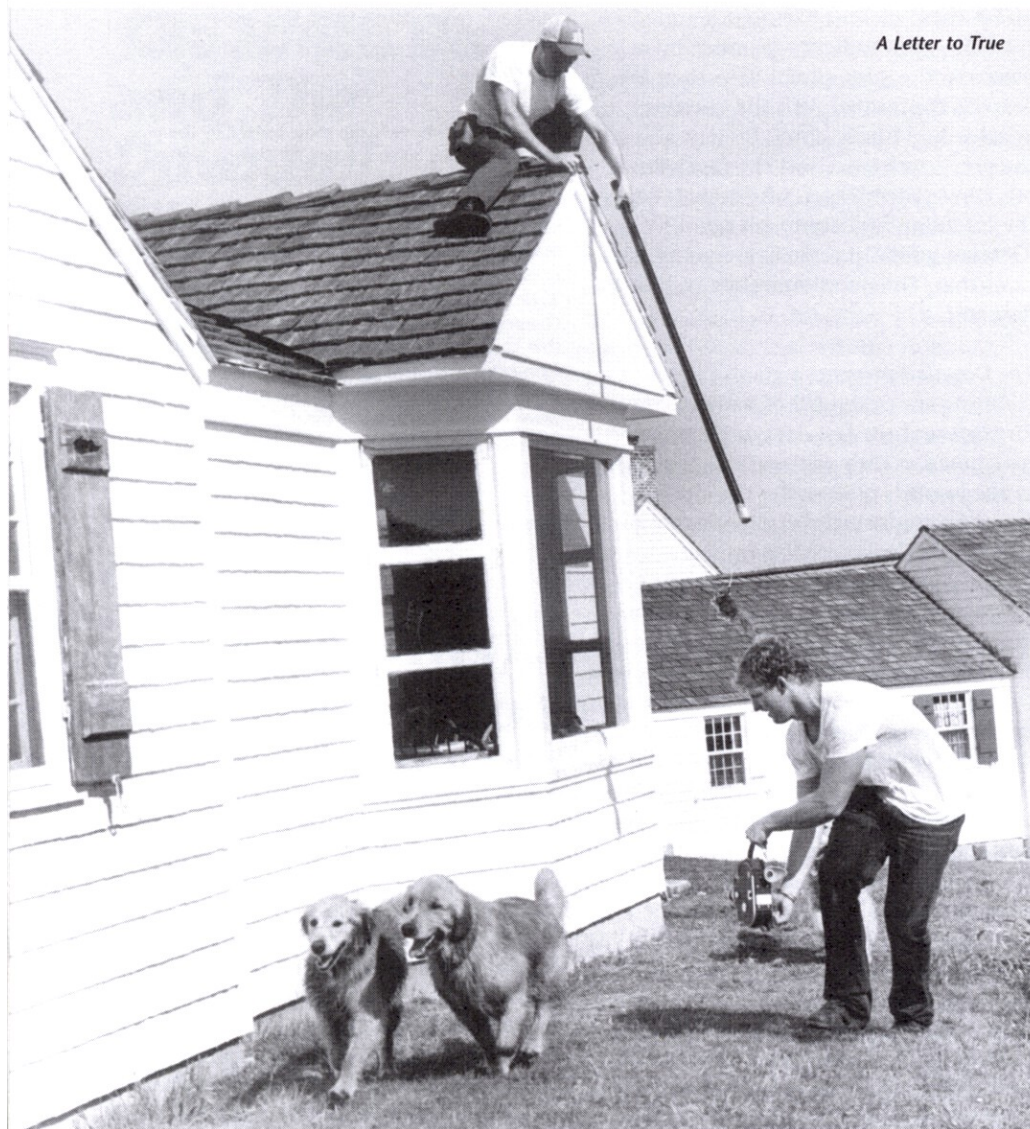
dogs (and other animals) are susceptible, like human beings, to experiencing emotional trauma when exposed to hardship or loss of a loved one. And it is us, as Webber's narration states and his images show, who create the racism and war the world experiences. *A Letter to True* contains elegiac moments but it maintains a commitment to the potential life offers in the form of love and friendship, creativity and beauty.

As the above-mentioned comments indicate, *A Letter to True* is, like the director's recent *Chop Suey* (2001), an unconventional and highly personal work. Webber's willingness to express his feelings, perceptions and thoughts in a direct and open way is found in his photographs and these films continue this approach. Unlike many filmmakers working in the documentary tradition, he is refreshingly honest about the subjective nature of his films, foregrounding his world and interests. Webber doesn't impose on the viewer

a rigid interpretation of the film's content; instead, working primarily on an intuitive level, he produces, as he says in the interview, a *collage*. The effect allows the viewer a more open-ended relationship with the material but it is also a high risk-taking form of filmmaking. Its success depends in part on the viewer's rapport with the filmmaker and a responsiveness to the frequently audacious image-sound, emotional-mental juxtapositions he constructs. On the other hand, there is no denying that Webber displays consistently an imaginative use of image and sound and that in itself is a pleasure to behold.

Bruce Webber, like Anges Varda, another photographer who became a filmmaker, makes films that have their own character and vision. Both are artists interested in exploring the potenital of the film medium. (Varda's most recent work, *Cinevardaphoto*, also screened in the festival, contains three short films she made between 1964 and 2004; each of the films

deals fascinatingly with the photographic image(s), considering such concerns as the context of production, possible usages and readings).

The interview was conducted during the 2004 Toronto International Film Festival and took place on 12 September at the Intercontinental Toronto Hotel. I want to thank Mia Farrell of dda public relations ltd, Los Angeles, CA for making the interview possible and Bruce Webber who, despite a tight schedule, was generous with his time and willing to discuss freely his ideas and work.

Richard Lippe: I was told I have twenty minutes.
Bruce Webber: I'll try to talk fast for you. (Laughter). Take your time.
Lippe: I wanted to ask you about the idea of the personal film or the essay film which you have moved into with *Chop Suey* and now *A Letter to True*.
Webber: Right.
Lippe: Some critics have mentioned that *Let's Get Lost* and *Broken Noses* have a subject matter which provides you with a structure. You are moving away from that to something which is a more personal and direct documentation. Did you consciously choose this direction or how did it occur?
Webber: Yeah. I think that this kind of filmmaking is sort of like putting a *collage* together. I make *collages*. I looked at my bulletin board above my print table and I felt I wanted to make a film like that bulletin board. It was what was around all my pictures. Sometimes you notice in books on a filmmaker or photographer, the opening end papers will be a *collage* of different things—maybe a picture of them when they were young, maybe their girlfriend or boyfriend and then the house where they grew up in and so forth. So that is what I wanted to start working on. But I feel more and more that so many films are story-boarded to such an exact extent...I just feel that there is a wonderful thing now where you can start with a film and end up with a different one. For instance, one day I was talking to Sean Penn as I was photographing him. He said, "Oh Bruce, how much longer are you going to take?" and I said, " about fifteen minutes." "Oh, thank God", he said, "I have to get back to the editing room because my producers think I have made a comedy but it is sort of like a tragedy." (Laughter). I totally understood that. I thought if I were that producer, as long as the film was good, I would have been

happy. I think we expect everything to always be what we are told it's going to be. I just think that it is sometimes nice in life if you plant a garden and other things come out of the ground as well as the things you planted.

Lippe: It's interesting that you say that. I saw a Kiarostami film yesterday, *10 on Ten*. He talks about his ideas on filmmaking and says he no longer writes a script or, if he does write something, it is very short. The actual film is made much more through the experience of the shooting. It becomes a more organic process. You seem to be talking about something like this.

Webber: Yeah. You know when I started work on my Robert Mitchum film, it was started as a film on a book that Bob and his brother John Mitchum had done, called *Them Ornery Mitchum Brothers*. But then, as I started into it, it became a musical; and then, from the musical, it became a film about an aging sex symbol who happened to be a man.

Lippe: That sounds good. I loved the Mitchum sequence in *Chop Suey*, where he sang. It's beautiful. Do you think this more personal filmmaking, because it doesn't have a guideline, demands a greater discipline from you?

Webber: Yeah. It's harder and not so indulgent as people think it is. Its much harder to reach into yourself. When I see films from the early Italian cinema, I see how a lot of the filmmakers really did that. Later on, I saw that in Pasolini. I saw it in Fellini where he would use his wife, and Marcello Mastroianni was really himself in *City of Women* or the film he was working on. About two years ago, I was photographing Ingmar Bergman and I was waiting in the lobby of the hotel he was staying in. I was very nervous because everybody told me how difficult he would be. I am sitting there with these two young girls and they said "Are you here to photograph Mr. Bergman? He hates being photographed". I said "Yes"; they said, "Oh, Good Luck". Just then, he walked out and he hugged me. I think that is what filmmaking is like in a way. Something you thing is going to work out, it does; other things, they don't. I think you are kind of just recording fact, do you know what I mean? I think that is the aliveness that I would like to bring to my films.
And when I see it in a piece of fiction, whether it is in a book or a film, and it has that aliveness, I think that is pretty great, that the actors are plugging into themselves and what's around them to make it as real as possible.

Lippe: Do you think that a film which lacks a strong structure demands a greater interaction on the viewer's part ? The viewer has perhaps more options to enter the film or use it.

Webber: Well, you know, I think you can't make a film for your audience. I think you make your film for your loved ones.

Lippe: Your movement from still photography to films—was that a gradual process or was it something you always intended to do?

Webber: I always wanted to do it. It just sort of happened though. I met a young cameraman, Jeff Price, and he showed me some 8mm films he did on Ludlow Street in New York. I had then just happened to photograph a young boxer at the training facilities in Colorado for the Olympics, Andy Minsker. Andy kept saying to us for the next months, whenever we talked to him, "Oh you guys will never come out here again to my spot". So we just went out there. I mean a lot of my films start as short films and, if I stay with them, they wind up as longer pieces. When I made Chet Baker's film, we were with Chet. We were photographing him in his bass player's apartment in Harlem. It was like out of a movie in a way, the lights were blinking from up high, from the sign into the apartment and the apartment was very shabby. Chet said, "What are you doing next week?" and I said, "I'm going out to California to photograph" and he said, "Well, I am going to be in San Jose." Well, I said, "Do you want to continue?" and he said, "Yeah, let's continue." That led into a process that happened for about two and a half years.

Lippe: Oh, really.

Webber: I think that's what so great about living. You can either fall into something or it can be gradual. I think there is always that little seed which says it. For me, it was really hard for people to accept the fact that I wanted to make films. When I first started making films, I remember with *Broken Noses*, it truly wasn't accepted until we won a Documentary Association Award. But then, all of a sudden, all of the people who just liked it, liked it. So it made me feel, not because I won an award, but because everybody has a different opinion about what film is. When we did *Let's Get Lost* and it won the Critics Award in Venice, a young guy from the studio came up to me when in was in LA, and he saw me, and he goes, "Oh Bruce, I remember seeing *Broken Noses* at a screening in LA and that's still my favourite film. I like that much better than

Let's Get Lost." So I think it is kind of funny, you know. You can't expect everybody to believe in what you do.

Lippe: I was thinking about films, the idea of image and sound. When you work on the kind of films you are doing now, how do you integrate the two, does image inspire music or the other way around? Do you have guidelines or is it spontaneous?

Webber: No, I think it is quite thought out. It's connected to what is going on in my life at that time, like the use of Phil Ochs' songs. I like his history as a musician. I love his lyrics. I love the songs. I listen to them a lot. I felt very strong about Doris Day [another great dog lover]. And Joni James. You know, my other musicians friends, I knew they were going to tease me about being so square. But I thought, it's the middle of the road, but I don't really care about that. I put Doris Day in and the next song is Thelonius Monk. So, I just do it, not because of anything, I think it is right for the film and right for what I want to say. But I think they are very related, the image and music.

Lippe: Yeah, I thought the opening of *A Letter to True* is very lovely. The Doris Day lyrics and then you go into the photographs of Dirk Bogarde [also a dog lover]— the lyrics, their meaning, the imagery and the narration. This is a kind of an aside, but do the lyrics come from *Jumbo* (1962)? The movie she made, you know, with the elephant and Jimmy Durante. (Laughter).

Webber: (laughter) Sure, of course. (Hearty laughter).

Lippe: Well, it [*A Letter to True*] ends with an elephant and Jimmy Durante.

Webber: Well, I was thinking about Jimmy Durante a lot. I have this little book of him called " The Schnozz" or something like that, which is about his nose or something. I was thinking about Jimmy Durante as this romantic figure. He did this album where he sings all these really romantic songs. So, I was thinking about him, and then was listening to a Peggy Lee album, early recordings she did with Jimmy Durante. And I could tell by the way they sang to each other, that they really had a love affair or had been in love with each other, or a great affection for each other. And I thought about that and, I don't know, I just wanted to give Jimmy Durante his own air play time.

Lippe: Well, its really unexpected. Its really quite nice, but it is like a shock.

Webber: (Laughter). I wouldn't have done it if it were a shock. (Laughter).

Lippe: I wanted to ask you about editing. With the editing of sound and image, you

can juxtapose whatever you choose. Is that a part of the appeal of filmmaking for you?

Webber: Well, you know, when we were talking earlier about photography and filmmaking, when you are looking at your contact sheets, its sort of a little bit like editing a film. That's why I like to spend a lot of time in the editing room, because it really helps me edit my contact sheets in any easier, more interesting way. I think that, I don't know, sometimes the prison walls of expression come up when somebody says that you have a lot of freedom. To create a world around you with a lot of freedom, takes a lot of discipline.

Lippe: Yeah. One of the things I like about the later films is the unexpectedness. Sometimes you cut and a song and a new image appear and you aren't prepared for it. They take you by surprise. It's very exciting. You are confronted with it and you go with it. It's very appealing, what you give the audience.

Webber: Oh, thank you. Sometimes, you know, we'll be somewhere, we'll be on the road and we'll meet somebody or see something and we'll try to make a record of this. I like filmmaking in the way that photography is like making a record of something. My dad made films, you know. His filmmaking was confined to a weekend, he was a weekend filmmaker. But he really made such beautiful films of all his pals riding horses and jumping out in the country. They were young guys and they didn't have money so they didn't have proper riding clothes, but they're so magical. All the film has got kind of messed-up now and has spots all over it everywhere. It's just magic, it's beautiful, it's like a silent from the early 1900s from France. Then he did colour films of my family in the garden and I just love them.

Lippe: I've got five minutes. So I'll go on.

Webber: You don't have to worry about it.

Lippe: You are so involved with popular culture—you repeatedly connect to actors. The old footage of Dirk Bogarde in *A Letter to True* , it is very beautiful, on a number of levels. The intimacy you construct through the narration about him and his friends such as Ava Gardner and then the tragic story about Bogarde and his partner. I guess what I am asking is if you are concerned with making movie stars less iconic, and giving them a more humanized presence. A different kind of picture of Dirk Bogarde comes out of those images. Is that what it's about for you?

Webber: Well, you know, I wanted to try to show that, first of all, how one's life can change in a day. [Bogarde's partner unex-

pectedly learnt that he was dying of cancer]. Then I also wanted to show, Dirk, who was an extraordinary actor, I wanted to show that he was human and had a life, worked hard, that he had a wonderful life with his lover. They had this beautiful experience; not unlike, it's a far stretch but, not unlike the craziness of Kelly's farm and all her sons and stuff. You know, that kind of magical time where somehow people collide with friends and lovers and animals and nature and it becomes magical. For instance, a bunch of my friends from New York went out to a place I have in Montana. They are pretty spoiled. So I was worried because I have teepees. People sleep in teepees there or in gypsy wagons and stuff. I was worried that they were going to hate it. All they came back with and told me was that they were in bed by ten together and they just thought that they never saw such beautiful skies in their whole life. So, in a way, that's what I am sort of talking about with Dirk or whoever. It's not so much that Dirk was a movie star. I think that if he had been a farmer, I would have done the same thing.

Lippe: Yeah. I think that comes through with the Bogarde images, the way they are used in the film. In your films, you talk about actors who mean something to you, like Elizabeth Taylor. Is that because they are a part of your youth and past? Or is it because those people are presences or personas that have a special meaning for you as opposed to a contemporary star? Or, you make no distinction between that?

Webber: Right. It is funny that you say that because sometimes people, when they see my films, they say, " Oh, I was just name-dropping." I mean, I really don't go out that much. I am not so social. I wouldn't really talk about people unless they meant something to me, like you say, in my past, or that they mean something to me in the future that I am having with them, or in the present. I just don't think that I could find somebody like Elizabeth Taylor to talk about in my films. You know, who is a young person right now because that person hasn't been able to have that life that she had. I think, in essence, why I chose these people, why I chose the people who did the narration [Julie Christie, Marianne Faithfull], why I make the films that I do, is that I really feel that I want to show people that whoever they are, they can have a big life. You know, that they should be interested in other people, they should care for other people and connect to them.

Lippe: Both *Chop Suey* and *A Letter to True* deal with the notion of mortality but there

is also a strong emphasis on pleasure, imagination and creativity, on fun. The sense of an enjoyment of life and experience. Is that what you are aiming for?

Webber: You know, I think, the older you get, the more you want to make your life a bit smaller, just out of a fear of living and dying. I think that it is important that you keep your life as it always was or try to make it larger because, I feel then that it's not so much about having your youth. I think it is so much about having experiences. Some of the youngest people I have ever known in my life have been someone like Allen Gingsberg because you would go to his house and be surrounded by all these young poets. They would be drinking that rice tree milk. Or Paul Cadmus. His grey hair was down to his shoulders. I started photographing Paul when he was almost ninety. And yet those people were kind of, they would meet a person and the first thing they wanted to know, after they looked at that person, is, " Wait." "Where are you from?"; "Are you in school?"; "What are you doing?"; "How did you get here?" or "I love that T-shirt you are wearing" or something like that. They were interested in things. So I think, no matter if you live out in the middle of the Badlands, you gotta to find somebody at the nearest gas station to ask a question to.

Lippe: One more question.

Webber: Sure.

Lippe: It's about animals. In part, given *A Letter to True*, but also just generally. Is there any one particular thing you see animals offering that is unique?

Webber: Well, you know, I think that animals represent a lot of things to people, like companionship, nonjudgmental feelings, love and devotion. I don't know. I think sometimes when you're, you try to find your way, your head and your heart, and you see a horse running across the grass and his mane is blowing, you can't help but think of the ballet or seeing a child reaching his arms out, you can't think of anything else but some extraordinary form of expression. So I just feel like that animals have always meant that to me, that sense of freedom. Sometimes people say to me, "Oh, if I have another life, I want to come back as your dogs" and I always say to them, "Well, in my life, I want to be more like my dogs."

Lippe: (laughter) That's very nice. Okay.

Webber: (laughter) Okay.

Lippe: I guess my time is up.

Webber: Okay. Take care.

Lippe: I enjoyed this very much. Thank you. Good bye.

Webber: So Long.

The Toronto Film Festival

RANDOM THOUGHTS

BY ROBIN WOOD

My health was poor throughout the festival, and I was able to see only seventeen films, sometimes in a less than wonderful state of mind. What follows will therefore be somewhat scrappy and tentative. Which is not to say that any statement by anyone calling him/herself a critic should ever be considered 'authoritative'—leave that to the reviewers, whose job it is to tell you whether or not you should see a given film, whereas a critic attempts to involve you in a discussion about a film you have seen and hopefully know well. I write here (necessarily) as a reviewer, a role I distrust, offering some rough notes on a few of the films to which I felt a strong reaction, whether positive or negative.

In each of the last two festivals one film has stood out for me as 'the best'. Last year it was the French/Moroccan *Mille Mois*, which apparently few saw except myself—I have not so far met anyone with whom to discuss it. I hoped it would have appeared by now on DVD, but this has happened only in France, available on the Internet but without subtitles (how good is your French? I can manage subtitles but not spoken French). This year —and with far more hope of some kind of release—the transcendent film is Jia Zhang-ke's *The World*, apparently seen and acclaimed by almost everyone. There are certain films where one somehow knows, from the opening shot, that one is in the presence of something remarkable - though in this case one had the prior experience of Jia's *Platform* and *Unknown Pleasures* to alert one in advance, whereas *Mille Mois* was, amazingly, a first film. When I walked out I felt as if I had been at the premiere of *La Regle du Jeu* or *Rio Bravo* or *Tokyo Story* or *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (none of which, however, as I recall, I especially liked when I first saw it!): there seemed the same total command of the medium, the same rightness of every shot. Whether this feeling will survive closer acquaintance is of course uncertain, but I feel a certain confidence. It is apparently the first film of Jia's that has the blessing of the Chinese authorities, and one wonders if they understood it: its most obvious strategy is to reveal the essential emptiness of the colossal theme park (major icons from the world's capital cities—Eiffel Tower,

Summer Storm

Leaning Tower of Pisa, etc..., dumped incongruously and haphazardly beside each other as if China were indeed encompassing the world) juxtaposed with the general sense of alienation and rootlessness of the characters. I cannot possibly say more until I've seen the film several times.

Gay (but not necessarily happy) movies

The German *Summer Storm* (Marco Kreuzpaintner) is, quite simply, the best—most complex and intelligent— 'coming out' movie I have seen. I think people (gay or straight) are weary of 'coming out' movies: we have seen so many, many of them rather weak and predictable, well intentioned but simplistic, following an increasingly familiar trajectory toward the inevitable celebration. Few people I met saw the film, which is a great pity, especially if the general lack of enthusiasm prevents widespread distribution: it's touching, tough and highly intelligent, and nothing is simple or glib. The other two gay-themed movies I saw (Almodòvar's *Bad Education*, Araki's *Mysterious Skin*) address the far more specific issue of child abuse but are very different in tone and effect. Almodovar is an experienced entertainer who seldom puts a foot wrong, and *Bad Education* is as enjoyable as most of his work, its exposure of the malpractices of Catholic priests very much in line with what audiences want to be told nowadays. It's all done in the manner of a pseudo-noir which allows the audience a certain distance from what is potentially a very disturbing experience. I don't wish to denigrate the film, which I enjoyed, but I hope this description suggests its limitations. Beside it, the Araki appears uncouth, almost clumsy, extremely unpleasant, full of pain and rage. What should we consider great filmmaking? For me, the Almodòvar disappears into the background, the Araki is still there, very

much in the foreground, raw, deeply disturbed and disturbing. I think I went out of the Almodòvar smiling slightly, and out of the Araki still fighting back tears. *Mysterious Skin* is undoubtedly his best film since *The Doom Generation*, which I continue to regard, against all who find this ridiculous, as one of the great—and most radical, terms that for me are closely interconnected though certainly not interchangeable— American movies of the past decade. The subject matter of *Mysterious Skin* unfortunately precludes any explicit politics beyond sexual politics. Yet, after the nowhere of *Nowhere* and the total absence of 'splendour' from the film that had that title, it is invigorating to find Araki recovering the passion of his earlier work. What is most remarkable about his new film (and what many will find problematic or worse) is that it is the first in my experience on this touchy subject that dares suggest that children, even quite young children, are already sexual beings with their own erotic desires— a fact I can vouch for from my own experience, having traced back sexual desires to the age of eight. This enormously complicates the issue of child abuse (which is why it is never recognized, being too inconvenient) without of course in the least modifying its ugliness and lasting harm. I shall just remark that I think, if I could have had a good sexual experience around the age of twelve with a sensitive and considerate male, my subsequent life would have been much the better for it. Araki's film is (quite rightly) concerned singlemindedly with the probable consequences of abuse, reaching ahead into the characters' adulthood, informing their lives and responses, but at least it recognizes the problem.

Final Cut and the (perhaps!) reinstatement of *Heaven's Gate*

Were I asked for a list of the '10 Best

Hollywood films of all time' I am uncertain of what the ten would be, but I am absolutely certain that *Heaven's Gate* would be among them. The tragedy of this film—its unbelievably idiotic dismissal by those American writers with inflated egos who call themselves critics but are in fact mere 'reviewers' (Vincent Canby, as High Priest at the sacrificial altar) giving snap judgements on what is acceptable and what is not—has its one parallel in the Hollywood past: von Stroheim's *Greed*. But no one ever learns. There was a first cut of Heaven's Gate, shown proudly to the United Artists executives (one of whom has published a book on his trials and tribulations, without ever for a moment realizing what a great film he is dealing with) that ran for five hours. I would love to see it, but it seems that all the footage has been 'junked' (in the brutal terms of the Hollywood philistines): *Greed* rides again, and ten or twenty years from now, we shall be watching videos of the existing stills from the original version of Heaven's Gate, its producers complicit in its destruction. Unlike *Greed,* however, *Heaven's Gate* at least continues to exist, in a form its maker accepted.

The documentary is fascinating, both for what it offers and what it suppresses. It attempts to be 'objective', to give both sides—which is to say it remains clearly within the 'dominant ideology' of Hollywood, in which questions of 'value' ('This may be a great movie') are fatally compromised by questions of capitalism ('What will make the most money?'). What, one supposes, can you expect from people who work for major Hollywood companies? We are told (without obvious irony) that the producers saw *Heaven's Gate* as another *Gone with the Wind,* which tells us a great deal about their standards. It appears (from the evidence of the documentary) that they saw no difference between two films that respectively (a) celebrate—if only in its decline, which we are invited, on the whole, to regret—a society built upon oppression and (b) lament the loss of a possible, real, democracy in its losing, hopeless battle for freedom and justice, its championship of the poor and oppressed, as relevant today as ever, in a world in which a few live in a luxury that means nothing more than that, that gives nothing to the community, while people, as valid as any other human beings, beg on the streets that I walk down every day. GWTW (as it is so often called, as our culture apparently requires it, as if it were some kind of icon) remains as undistinguished, on every level, as it ever was:

how can one possibly relate to it today, unless by some strange yearning for a different culture in which blacks were blacks and were Oh! so thrilled to be able to serve their white masters? I find the film today almost impossible to sit through, its only great moments being Butterfly McQueen's extraordinary performance as a young oppressed black woman driven to the verge of insanity by the situation in which she is trapped - and even that can be assimilated into the 'dominant ideology' as 'black stupidity', the one moment in a truly—today, I would have thought, almost unwatchably—dreary film (who the hell cares about Scarlett O' Hara, and why are we expected to find her interesting?). What is peculiarly fascinating about *Final Cut* is that no one referenced in the documentary (including the persons interviewed) appears to have understood, even remotely, what the film is about, or to have shown any intelligent interest in what Cimino was doing. It remains, on the levels of both form and content, one of Hollywood's few radical masterpieces.

Ma Mère (Christophe Honore) was not, I suppose, the worst film in the festival in terms of 'the art of cinema', but it certainly provided my most unpleasant experience. I would have passed it by here but for the fact that, after the screening, a friend connected it to Haneke's *La Pianiste* (its problematic of perverse sexuality and degradation, plus the presence of Isabelle Huppert in the lead) as if it were much the same kind of thing over again, whereas to me the two films seem diametrically opposed. Catholicism and damnation loom heavy over *Ma Mère*, its representation of sexuality characterized chiefly by an unhealthy combination of fascination and disgust. The characters' obsessions with degradation are simply a 'given', and they are allowed no means of transcending them. In Haneke's extraordinary film the protagonist's obsession is fully grounded in her personal psychology, and the film is about her progress towards transcendence and a new beginning. Haneke expresses no disgust with her behaviour, in all its extremity and absurdity, because he understands it; *Ma Mere* at once revels in the decadence it depicts, is fascinated by it, and hypocritically condemns it. *La Pianiste* is a film about sickness; *Ma Mere* is a sick film.

10th District Court, Moments of Trials (Raymond Depardon) must surely be one of the most fascinating films (fiction or non-fiction) about a justice system, in this case French but recognizable everywhere within the western world. Everyone I talked to found it a 'winner', and it will

surely get a release, either theatrically or on DVD or (hopefully) both. A documentary, for me it instantly demanded comparison with a fictional film: Otto Preminger's masterpiece *Anatomy of a Murder.* The link between these two very different films should be obvious: in both, the real judge is the spectator in the cinema. Preminger was careful to show the jury merely as an anonymous group of people in longshot: at no point in his film are we given the traditional Hollywood treatment of watching the jurists' reactions to bits of evidence or arguments by the lawyers, to tell us how things are going and how we should relate to them, and identify us with a specific point of view. Hence, set free, we become the jury, and are encouraged to participate in the complexities and perplexities of judgement. Depardon takes this a step further: here, the objective, dispassionate camera, moving freely and nonjudgementally among the participants, places everyone on trial: the accused, the prosecuting and defence attorneys, and finally Madame la Juge herself. Ultimately, the object of interrogation is not the individual malefactor but the justice system. Of the cases we are permitted to watch (and how wonderful of the judge to allow the camera to examine her like that!), I was worried by two of the judgements: the young black illegal immigrant who surely could have been helped to apply for legal status but is (apparently) merely sent back to his homeland without assistance, and the man who admits to being present purely to challenge the system itself. Some people I talked to found him merely annoying and pointlessly disruptive, as did the judge herself who became visibly angry. I thought he had a case. In general, however, I thought she was admirable, and if I am ever brought up before a court to be prosecuted for subversive activities, I hope I have someone as fair as she seems to be to decide my term of imprisonment.

I cannot end this brief and unsatisfactory review without acknowledging the film that, in the entire festival, gave me the most unadulterated pleasure: Jay Rosenblatt's *I Like It a Lot.* It is undoubtedly among the festival masterpieces, and I have already watched it six times, reduced to various degrees of happy hysteria. As an unashamed depiction of shameless sensual pleasure it rivals anything I can think of in or out of the festival, and all this in four minutes of screen time. Happily, its director has supplied me with a video, so I can indulge myself at any moment when I feel depressed.

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